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ABSTRACT

The Communication Theory and Methodology section of the Proceedings contains the following 14 papers: "Press Releases and the 'Bscore': New Statistical Measurement Explored" (Lee Bollinger); "A Systematic Approach to Analyzing the Structure of News Texts" (Michael Schmierbach); "Setting the Proximity Frame: Distance as an Affective Attribute in Reporting Terrorism Events" (Kenneth C. Killebrew); "How Sexual Strategies Theory, Gender, and the Third-Person Effect, Explain Attitudes About Pornography" (Ven-hwei Lo and Anna Paddon); "Challenging the 'Mobilization Model' of Agenda Setting" (John Bentley Zibluk); "Impact of Question Order on the Third-Person Effect" (Michel Dupagne, Michael B. Salwen, and Bryant Paul); "Pleasant Company and the Construction of Girlhood: Cultural Studies Theory and Methodology, A Case Study" (Carolina Acosta-Alzuru); "Looking Beyond Job Approval: How Media Coverage of the Monica Lewinsky Scandal Influenced Public Opinion of the Presidency" (Spiro Kiousis); "The Presidential Candidates in Political Cartoons: A Reflection of Cultural Differences between the United States and Korea" (Jongmin Park and Sungwook Shim); "Sounds Exciting!!: The Effects of Auditory Complexity on Listeners' Attitudes and Memory for Radio Promotional Announcements" (Robert F. Potter and Coy Callison); "An Efficacy Model of Electoral Campaigns: The 1996 Presidential Election" (Mahmoud A. M. Braima, Thomas J. Johnson, and Jayanthi Sothirajah); "Don't Look At Me! Third-person Effect and Television Violence" (Lois A. Boynton and Haoming Denis Wu); "The Third-Person Effect and the Hierarchy of Communication Effects: The Perceived Persuasive Power of Public Relations" (Martin Eichholz); and "Re-Thinking the Role of Information in Diffusion Theory: An Historical Analysis with an Empirical Test" (Eric A. Abbott and J. Paul Yarbrough). (RS)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Press releases and the *Bscore:* New statistical measurement explored

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Presented at the
1999 AEJMC Convention
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Press releases and the *Bscore*: New statistical measurement explored

Abstract

An empirical study of the press release is the focus of this paper. Based on dynamic social impact theory, a new statistical measurement was applied to 722 press releases generated by the Media Relations writers at the University of South Carolina during 1997. The results of the study indicate positive potential for this new *Bscore* technique as well as future avenues for further exploration of the press release as an instrument of impact.

Newspaper editors make much to do about improperly executed press releases. The problem with press releases "is not with the vehicle," according to Williams (1994). The problem, he argues, is with those whose job it is to transform the vehicle into effective communication (p.5). Williams admonishes those practitioners who cannot write an effective news release. He states, "the sad truth is that if you don't know how news is communicated from a newsman's point of view, you ought to be selling shoes at the mall" (p.5).

This paper focuses on public relations and specifically the press release -- its salience, perceptions and problems and, more importantly, the feasibility of a quantitative measurement of the press release as an instrument for empirical study. Theresearcher relies on dynamic social impact theory which is operationalized for the statistical measurement of the data. Reported in this paper is the analysis of 722 press releases (does not include the approximate three to five day-book articles faxed daily to media) generated in 1997 by the Media Relations Department of the University of South Carolina at Columbia and the 822 press articles that were found directly tied to the press releases. First, a literature review about press releases is offered; next, an introduction to dynamic social impact theory is given; third, operationalization of the new statistical measurement of the press release is explained; and lastly, findings and recommendations for future inquiry are suggested.

Press releases and the media

Previous studies have indicated why the media reject press releases. Morton (1986) found that press releases are rejected most often because of the source location. Other studies about rejection include reasons such as the news element's impact (Morton

& Ramsey, 1994); poor syntactical structure (Walters et al., 1994); irrelevance of content to community (Griffin & Dunwoody, 1995); not matching public's agenda (Walters et al., 1996); lack of strategic thinking and poor execution (Williams, 1994); lack of brevity, clarity and directness (Marken, 1994); and lack of local angle (Minnis & Pratt, 1995). Additionally, Turk (1986a) argues that newsworthiness of the release[1] and its timing are crucial factors.

The notion that the public relations practitioner and the media [the terms *media* and *press* are interchanged but are meant to indicate print journalism] work as cohorts is not a new one. Public relations offices are responding more and more toward being a journalist (Geuder, 1995). Media relations professionals are figuring out how to meet the press's needs, instead of the other way around. What this indicates is that today's public relations practitioner considers his/her public first but only in terms of a journalist's role. As Geuder (1995) argues, to succeed in media relations, one needs to operate more strategically, become more responsive, and find new ways to communicate messages to reporters (p.46). In short, the PR practitioner needs to think like reporters think. It is the view by Geuder and others then that the PR practitioner must work unilaterally with the journalist, the media. The objective by the practitioner is press attention; the objective by the press is added audience. The tool both use is persuasive.

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[1] Turk (1985,1986) makes mention of the ability to transmit issue salience by the PR practitioner.

Persuasion and dynamic social impact theories

People will change their behavior or beliefs if they can be impacted. Latané (1981) argued that we are all influenced by the actions of others, entertained by their performances and sometimes persuaded by their arguments. He added that we are sometimes threatened by the power of others, angered by their attacks, but fortunately also supported, comforted and sustained by love. All of these effects, he wrote were "social impacts." The concept of social space, according to Latané (1996b), accounts for how dynamic social impact allows social systems to organize and structure themselves into local clusters of consensus in attitudes, values, practices and identities (p.26). Larson (1995) proposes that persuasion intentionally limits or extends sources and receivers and attempts to change individuals' attitudes, beliefs, opinions or behaviors by restricting the individuals' frames of reference (p.10). Both theories claim that social impact can be achieved using precise cognitive manipulations of behavior. In many ways, persuasion theory's off-shoots of cognitive dissonance, inoculation theory, rhetorical theory, uses and gratification, and cultivation theory are all suggestive of exactly what Latané's dynamic social impact (DSI) theory suggests -- influence of or impact on society (the individual or society as a collective). Specifically, Latané states what he means by social impact:

> By social impact, I mean any of the great variety of changes in physiological states and subjective feelings, motives and motions, cognitions and beliefs, values and behavior, that occur in an individual, human or animal, as a result of the real, implied or imagined presence or actions of other individuals (Latané, p.343).

Latané's (1981) DSI theory is influenced by Moscovici's (1984) social representation theory in that DSI theory attempts to identify the ingredients of social representations. Huguet (1996) and Latané (1996a) suggest that we can identify spatial clusters of bundled beliefs, attitudes and practices emerging from dynamic social impact as *social representations*. Latané (1996) offered that much of his work in DSI theory is derived from the work of Kurt Lewin (1938) who divided social reality into three fields -- a life space[physical space], a surrounding environment space [social space], and a boundary [psychological space] where the physical environment and the life space are aware of each other (p.27).

Latané (1996) points out that early Lewinian theorists cared only for the life space which was not to be confused with geographic environment of physical stimuli. Lewin's psychological space could not be determined by a single axiom for it may be shorter than physical distance as when travel is easy or pleasurable or it may be longer as when travel is unfamiliar or frightening (p.27). So, we are influenced by what is around us, from the social world, which in turn affects our mental representations of the physical world, Moscovici's social representations. Persuasion effects and dynamic social impact both rely on results; yet, as stated earlier, we often cannot see the results/impact. Latané explained that social impact (can be seen) is the *result* of social forces (like physical forces of light, sound, gravity and magnetism) operating in a social force field or social structure (Figure 1: Principle 1, *I=f(SIN))* (Latané, 1981; p.344).

According to Latané's graph (Figure 1), when a social source acts upon a target individual, the amount of impact experienced by the target should be a *multiplicative* function of the *strength, S*, the *immediacy, I,* and the *number, N*, of sources present. Latané explained that he thought of *strength* as the salience, power, importance or intensity of a given source to the target; by *immediacy*, he meant closeness in space or time and absence of intervening barriers or filters; by *number*, he meant how many

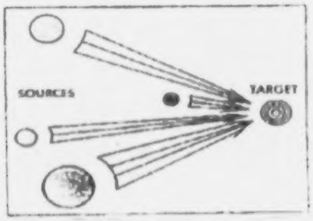

Figure 1.

people there are in the force field. He used the metaphor of a light bulb falling on a surface and explained that the amount of light is a multiplicative function for the wattage or intensity of the light bulbs shining on the surface, closeness to the surface and the number of bulbs, so the impact of the light bulbs shining on the surface, their closeness to the surface, and the number of bulbs, so the impact experienced by an individual is a multiplicative function of *SNI*. He likens this impact to the impact experienced by an individual and predicted that impact on an individual will depend on the higher the status, the more immediate the influence and the greater the number of other people affecting him/her (Latané, 1981;p. 344).[2] Principle 2: $I=sN^t<1$.

Latané explains that when people are in a multiplicative force field, the amount of social impact, I, they experience will equal some power, t, of the number of sources, N, times a scaling constant, s. Also, the value of the exponent t should be less than one: Impact will increase in proportion to some root of the number of people present. He explains that his work derives from Asch's work with the magic number three and group consensus and conformity where Asch found that adding another person to a group of three does not increase impact upon members to the same extent that adding another person to a dyad, thereby making it a trio, does (p. 345).

DSI theory depends on three subdivisions. Unlike persuasion avenues on which the receiver can venture, however, the subdivisions are uniquely connected for impact on the individual. In other words, these three elements must be in place for full impact to take place. In a study conducted by Bassett and Latané (1976), they tested the notion that the status, the distance and the number of others involved in catastrophes would dictate the amount of news value given to the news. They had a sample of non-journalism students decide how many column inches to devote to stories of varying degrees of catastrophes and found that the interest value of news events seemed to grow in proportion to the square root of the number of people involved. Also, the researchers noticed significant differences in the news value placed on catastrophes based on location -- nearby vs. faraway events, and they noticed more space given to the fictional catastrophes based on the severity of the event [i.e., they found a bomb story more newsworthy than a story about a fire].

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[2] He writes, "the laws governing the intensity of a social flux are comparable to the laws governing the intensity of a luminous flux" (344).

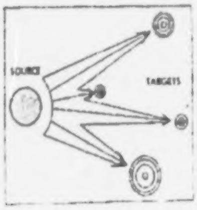


Figure 2.

Interestingly, and in contrast to the multiplicative function of strength, number and immediacy on a target, when targets are increased by a source, the impact is divided. This is precisely what happens when individuals are media-bombarded with too much information; they often begin to pay less and less attention. (Figure 2: Principle 3: Multiplication versus division of impact, $I=f(1/SIN)$ (Latané, 1981; 349).

Latané uses the example of a person giving a speech. As the target of social forces emanating from each member of the audience and the object of their attention, he or she is in a multiplicative force field and should feel greater tension the larger the audience [i.e., in the figure here, the source is the speaker and impact on each audience member from the speaker is not evenly distributed] (Latané, 1981; p.349). So, a highly credible communicator (such as a public relations practitioner who is handling an issue for a client or a media relations writer who telephones a reporter about special press coverage for the organization) can induce people to go along with a message that is more discrepant from their attitudes than can a low-credible communicator. It becomes more difficult when a persuader attempts to influence an individual who is highly (ego) involved in an issue; then, he/she is quite intolerant of opposing positions on the issue. These individuals will have a narrow latitude of acceptance and a wide latitude of rejection. The DSI scholar, however, would suggest that involvement will depend more on not only density (strength) of the message, but the number of messages, and the immediacy of the content. Advertisers well know the significance of these dimensions with print and electronic ads, and political candidates bombard audiences with TV ads for these very reasons. Public relations practitioners and media relations writers understand these dimensions in terms of the press releases they generate.

The Triadic Model Approach

The world is shared, according to Woodward (1996), and communication is the form of movement within the world, a term Woodward explains comes from phenomenologists to suggest ongoing context within which things are generated, distinctions are made and connections are established (p.156).

Woodward's essay advocates the Tehranian triadic approach to communication grounded in Kirkpatrick's (1986) mutual-personal model of community and communication especially as developed in the writings of Buber, Macmurray, Pols and Taylor. Woodward argues four fundamental points: a shared world approach to communication is a salutary one for the field to pursue; the approach is conceived as a shift toward a triadic understanding of communication; a comprehensive systematic formulation of the triadic approach will develop from foundational insights of philosophers who advocate a mutual-personal model for understanding communication and the nature of human agency; and, lastly, the most important to this study, the emphasis on communication as transactional participation will define the next appropriate phase of development of the triadic approach (p.157).

Table 1.

Semiotic approach	**Language connects society**
Sociological approach	**Society with groups**
Interactionist approach	**Meaning of behaviors**

Woodward reviews three principal orientations toward triadic symbolic production that he labels the *semiotic approach* (issues of language that interconnect with sociological aspects of community), *sociological approach* (social elements within groups such as political organizations, marriage relations and religious sects), *interactionist approach* (Table 1) (Mead's equation of meaning between a dyad arises within the field of the relation between a gesture and the subsequent behavior of the other in response to the gesture and meanings are created by the individual; so language does not simply symbolize a situation or object that is already in place, it makes possible the existence or appearance of that situation or object) (p.159).

For Woodward, "the triad then is conceived as the site of communication; the symbolic materials from which communication is constructed; and the interactionally-generated products of multiple instances of communication" (p.160). Woodward draws on various researchers -- John Dewey, Richard Newbold Adams and Clifford Christians-- to formulate a triadic approach (the word, *triadic*, signifies a three-fold parameter in a relationship between variables) that he argues seeks to provide a focus and a structure for addressing these processes (how cultural influence regulate, express, transform and permutates the human psyche). He argues that we can advance this search by an elaborated model of what can be thought of as the triadic field within which human participation is transacted.

Woodward's model can incorporate the dimensions of *public relations practitioner*, *media* and *public* while still keeping Latané's theory of impact in mind. In such a model, the press release and press articles serve to bond PR agents and media with the public. The practitioner *aims* toward the public via the media, which acts as accomplice to also *aim* toward public. Overshadowing each entity, however, is the climate of communication. The public is influenced by its climate in the very laws of society that we live by; the media by the climate of its own organization and the practitioner likewise must answer to the climate of communication within and outside its organization. The Woodward model for both practitioner and media has its own infrastructure with its cultural societal relations, language and shared meaning, all of which is connected and impacted with and by publics which in turn have physical infrastructure. Before operationalizing the dimensions of DSI theory, however, there is one paradigm that is of importance in considering when suggesting any measure of a press release, an element this researcher calls the accomplice paradigm.

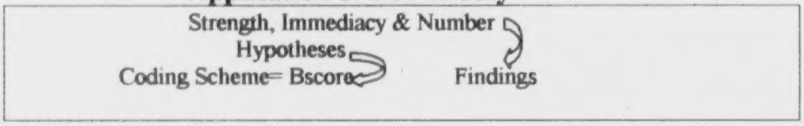
The discussion of both DSI theory by Latané, who uses the criteria of Moscovici's social representation theory, and Woodward's triadic model approach is essential in the development of the hypotheses in this study. It is the researcher's contention that public relations practitioners and the media as accomplices together impact society. The media and the public relations practitioner work as *accomplices*, each with different ends in mind -- the media desire to garner audiences (sales) and the practitioners desire to garner community attention and support. (Interestingly, both end results, however, have the same social impact). The press release acts as the conveyance belt by which both parties attain their goals. With this in mind, a hypothesis for the study is proposed:

H1: the higher the Bscore of the press release, the better the chances of multiple articles being generated in the press.

One element or factor (mentioned earlier) that will impact the publication of a press release, no matter how high a Bscore given to it, is what this researcher refers to as the *climate of communication.* For purposes of exploring the possibility of something besides the dimensions of the Bscore impacting the publication of a press release (or the information contained therein), classifications of the press releases that are usually generated in higher education seem to be on these subjects: tuition, university advancement health research, crime research, graduates and alumni, gifts/donations, the arts, human science research, faculty and biological research. Generally, people in the community are going to want to read about information that will affirm their choice of the university in the first place. Such issues as tuition increases, gifts to the university, enrichment in the arts, research reports on health, matters about safety of people and students in particular are going to gain attention by the press because they well understand these topics are of interest to the readers of their papers. A second hypothesis is therefore proposed:

H2: The greater the salience of the press release towards community residents in university matters that pertain to money, health, students, art/entertainment enrichment, and safety, the more likely press releases will achieve publication.

Application of DSI Theory



In applying DSI theory, social impact (publication of articles/stories) occurs when the variables of **strength**, **immediacy** and **number** are contained or found within press releases and then scored. So, the score for a press release can be operationalized by these dimensions:

Strength = content analyzed as either active or passive impact; active impact pertains to content about community, society, and/or the individual that is active in engagement. Hence, a news release about a raise in taxes (active) versus plans for a theme park in two years that would be developed on a vacant piece of land near the river of a nearby community is considered passive. In Morton's (1986) study, she found that newspapers choose releases more frequently that contain information about coming events or research that pertains to the institution reporting the activity. In the previous case, that of a theme park, the impact would not be considered yet salient (strong enough) for the individual even though eventually it will have impact of a positive nature on the community.

Minnis and Pratt (1995) in their study of press release selections by newspapers found that the chances that the media would publish the content of a press release depended on whether the content was in the category of a "hometowner" -- having a local angle. We could look at hometowner angle as some news that actively engages (hence actively impacts) the audience. Passive impact could be content that contained news of the past; hence, the impact would be passive and therefore lower. Again, Minnis and Pratt found that overall rejection of releases was most often because the content contained past events, old news, rather than coming events, new news. The strength of the press release then positively correlates with strength of impact on individuals within a community.

Immediacy = the nature (timeliness, represented by number of days in between the date of the press release and the article garnered from the press release, and this would include the fact that announcements in press releases sometimes will be more immediate than at other times) of the press release positively correlates with impact on the community. Timeliness is mentioned over and over by researchers in public relations: Morton (1986); Turk (1985),(1986); Minnis and Pratt (1995); and Williams (1994). The concept of timeliness refers to chronological time -- how soon an event is going to take place. A progress report issued as a press release by a company's PR practitioner will not have that sense of immediacy, i.e., like some event that is about to happen and will in some way affect an individual/community. Immediacy is measured then by a timeliness factor. If an impact is going to take place soon, there is more immediacy.

Number = the number of items mentioned in the press release has more impact on the community. While most of the studies mentioned in this paper have been focused on categories like "coming events" "local news" "past events" "institutional" etc., what is often overlooked is the fact that a press release sometimes carries multiple subjects within it, even though practitioners suggest it is best to separate releases per subject/topic in each. This study suggests there will be more impact when there is multiplicity. For example, in the case of an organization that is announcing a fund-raising dinner where a celebrity will also be present who will be guest speaker, the fact is that there are two events being announced -- dinner and guest speaker. This press release will have more impact than one announcing the fund-raising dinner only. Media, for it to work as accomplice, wants news.

Density is the operative word for all three concepts--*strength, immediacy and number*. Dynamic Social Impact theory, according to Latané, provides a well-defined (and simplistic) framework that can explain correlation. He uses mass media as an accomplice for influence. Latané writes that the media is used to increase the scale of spatial clustering of cultural elements and thereby increase the degree of correlation among them. It is the media that can transcend space and span time and can carry forward ideas and images of a distant past [and future] all of which can result in dynamic social impact. The effect discussed in this paper, then, is described as **impact** recognized by the articles or stories generated, with more impact being found at certain times than at others. As Latané argues, rather than reducing dynamic social impact, the mass media may reinforce it[3].

Specifically, if social impact is dependent on these variables, then the relationship between public relations practitioner and media as an accomplice should be evident in both the literature of the public relations practitioner and the media (newspapers, magazines and other).

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[3] Latané writes: The media may reflect as much as shape the concerns and beliefs of a population -- editors may be more interested in attracting then in converting viewers. Thus, rather than reducing dynamic social impact, the mass media, depending on the state of equilibrium reached by a social system, may reinforce it (1996;63).

With this argument then, one could examine an agency's press releases and research media impact by retrieving articles found in newspapers, magazines or other or by retrieving recorded broadcasts from television or radio stations. It is, of course, easier to find previously printed articles than to attempt the latter. Two relevant studies about press releases are worth noting.

The following categories of press releases were found in two studies that examined a) how newspapers choose the releases they use (Morton, 1986); and b) the criteria for a newspaper selecting and rejecting releases (Minnis and Pratt,1995). First, categories from the Morton (1986) study include: Institutional, Coming Events, Past Events, Consumer Information, Timely topics, Features, and Research Stories. Of note, 24% of these releases demonstrated a preference for consumer information and the next strongest preference was for coming events, of which 15% were published. This is interesting because these two categories, *consumer information* and *coming events* demonstrate two dimensions of Latané's DSI theory -- *immediacy* and *strength* as operationalized in the Bscore.

Second, categories from the Minnis and Pratt (1995) study include: coming events, timely topics, and institutional news. In all, three editors-- news, entertainment and features-- received 189 releases and used 65 for publication. 43 of those used were on coming events and seven were on timely topics. In general, coming events had the highest significant differences in received and used. Overall, these researchers state, 57% of the releases chosen were for their local angle. In their questionnaire to editors, all three editors coded "well-prepared" among the top three reasons for selecting releases. Local angle and the subject itself were the other two reasons for selecting releases. This works well with again Latané's concept of and *strength* and *number*. The former signifies coming events and hometowner angle and the latter signals dense content (multiple subject matter).

The studies prove useful in coding Latané's dynamics of strength, immediacy and number, in the study of an agency's press releases and the resulting articles. To measure each press release, a quantitative score (a Bscore) of each press release using the DSI dimensions was applied as outlined below.

Table 2. B-SCORE TECHNIQUE WITH SAMPLE

Variables:

STRENGTH contains two dimensions that pertain to type of content

A) whether the content is active, passive or mixed; it is considered active when there is some action going on, i.e., a dinner, contest, fund-raiser, program, etc.; it is considered passive when there is inaction or past action in the press release, i.e., summary of the past year, summary of plans for the coming year, item correction. Mixed, on the other hand, pertains to a press release that contains news about an event and summary of past or future progress.

B) whether the press release contains news about a celebrity involvement (limited to prominent figures), an event or an announcement (statement).

Code:	Rhetoric		Content	
	Active	3	**Celebrity**	3
	Mixed	2	**Event**	2
	Passive	1	**Announcement**	1

NUMBER contains one dimension only that pertains to content

A) how many sources(individuals or entities) the press release contains or events the press release is about or or whether there is no event/ no real source at all in the release–in an announcement, for example, names might be used but unless there are quotes, the press release has very little impact on the reader.

Code:		
	Two+events/sources	3
	One event/source	2
	No event/source	1

IMMEDIACY contains two dimensions that pertain to space and time

A) space deals with the area that the news impacts -- whether it impacts or will be important to the immediate local area, the regional area (as in southeast, southwest, etc., or the state), or whether the news has an importance to a national audience (which has the least impact to a local audience)

B) time deals with the date of the release and the date (if there is one) of the event or important item mentioned in the release; since studies show that media (editors) want timely announcements/releases, the further away (as in either far-future or distant past) the least attention will be given to it by media.

	Space			Time	
Code:	**Local**	3	Code:	**0-90 days**	3
	Regional	2		**90+ days**	2
	Mixed / national	1		**No time frame**	1

To tabulate : Add then divide by 5= (3 is highest Bscore possible)

Example press release and subsequent coding:

BEST C... ...ABLE

NEWS
Office of Media Relations
Columbia, SC 29208
For more information contact: Bond Nickles

University of South Carolina
June 23, 1997
803-777-5400

USC names Graham, Allen to Interim Dean posts

Dr. Blease Graham Jr., dean of the University of South Carolina's College of Criminal Justice, has been named interim dean of the College of Liberal Arts, effective July 1. He also will continue his duties with the College of Criminal Justice.

Graham will succeed Dr. Leston Lefton, who is leaving USC to take a similar position at George Washington University. Graham, who joined USC in 1970, served as associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts from 1991 until moving to criminal justice in 1994.

Dr. Harvey Allen, associate dean for administration in the College of Education, has been named interim dean of the college, also effective July 1.

Allen succeeds Sandra Robinson, who accepted a dean's appointment at the University of Central Florida. Allen joined USC in 1969 and is a professor in the department of instruction and teacher education.

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Table 3.

Coding the above press release:

Strength:	Rhetoric	(passive content)	1
	Content (announcement)		1
Number:	One source*		2
Immediacy:	Space	(Local news)	3
	Time	(0-90days)	3
Total			10 ÷ 5=**2.0 (Bscore)**

*the source is the dean in the above press release.

Findings

A total of 722 press releases, generated in 1997 by the Media Relations Department at the University of South Carolina, was scored. These resulted in 822 articles that are directly tied to the press releases. [It should be noted that another 400 articles were published that also had focus on the University of South Carolina and while not directly linked to the press releases the department generated, could be linked to either the more than 800 Daybook paragraphs that are faxed once a year (three to four daily) to media and/or the three to 15 telephone calls made by each of the five writers on a daily basis. The writers make these calls for purposes of making connections for reporters and faculty of the university or in "pitching" story ideas to reporters especially around the state of South Carolina and sometimes to national media also. These articles were not included in the 822 total above noted].

Press releases are produced daily for the university's departments, colleges, programs and for special activities/events. Hence, each press release falls under a subject abbreviation, such as *Psyc* for Psychology Department or *Alum* for Alumni Department or *Jour* for the College of Journalism and Mass Communications. There are 71 subjects/departments. Of these subjects or departments, 14 generated 522 articles (37.2 average annually); 36 generated 200 articles (5.5 average annually) and 22 generated no press articles during 1997, at least not that the clipping service used by the Media Relations Department picked up. Of the 22 departments or programs categorized in the 1997 files in the Media Relations Department, some are not used to track articles. For example, the calendar yearly is not tracked by the clipping service. This is a yearly calendar that goes out which editors and reporters more or less use during the year to keep up with the academic events and holidays. A few departments do not send news-type information to the MR Department – e.g., International business Department, Public Policy Institute, National Advocacy Center, Carolina Program Union). Also, during the year, folders change with deletions and additions of programs and temporary departments.

Understandably, higher education often does more informing than *pitching for a story*. For example, alumni announcements are abundant; reporters regularly are told about a resident of their community who has received either a fellowship, scholarship or some award. These are not often published, due to space limitations, unless the gift or award is more substantial than usual. As a result, while there were 43 press releases generated for alumni of USC in 1997, only four press articles appeared[4]. In order for such an announcement to get coverage, according to DSI theory, the press release would have to be denser -- something greater for impact on the community would have to be reported in the press release. The following chart shows the disciplines garnering the most press articles during 1997 (compacted into categories):

Table 4.

Health	**Total Press Releases Used by Press**	**% of 722**
School of Medicine		
Public Health	10 garnered 75 articles	10.38%
Safety		
Criminal Justice		
Law School	8 garnered 58 articles	8.03%
Education costs/related		
Board of Trustees		
Administration	31 garnered 151 articles	20.91%
University Advancement*		
English Department		
Religion**	11 garnered 73 articles	10.11%
Students		
Student Affairs		
Commencement		
Student Orientation	13 garnered 37 articles	5.12%
Arts		
Fine Arts/McKissick Museum		
Theater	31 garnered 128 articles	17.72%
*information that enriches the image of the university		
**this was a special conference about religion and Christianity that took place		
Totals:	**522 articles**	**72.27%**

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[4] It should be noted that the press clipping service used for tracking press coverage and can miss accounting for articles occasionally.

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As stated earlier, the newsworthiness of educational matters for people rests in their perception of importance: news about monetary issues (tuition, donations, scholarships), safety issues, scientific research, arts promotion, education, students and general advancement of the university are by far the more important topics. This variable, specific category, is yet another example of *climate of communication* that the Bscore does not account for in the coding scheme. While strength of the news release does depend on active news and the occasion of the news (i.e., event or celebrity or announcement), it does not account for general interest of the community by topic (which again is involved in climate of communication). Still, based on salience of the news releases in terms of certain topics, ***H2*** is supported by the findings as shown in Table 1.

As a measure of intercoder reliability, two coders' scores were compared of 100 randomly selected press releases using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient and found reliability at .9465. This puts the score close to 1.0 which, when this close, Weinberg and Goldberg (1990) state there is an extremely positive linear relationship between the two variables [scores of two raters] (p.111).

Statistical significance*

In the sample set of 722 press releases, only one press release received a Bscore of 3.0, the highest possible score. When averaging all Bscores (the average was 1.9), 453 press releases scored above the average (actually a 2.0 or above). Of the 71 subjects coded, 24 subjects had at least 50% of their press releases scoring a 2.0 and higher. Those press releases scoring 2.0 and higher alone generated 522 articles (or 72.1% -Table 2) (See Figure 3 below which presents a line graph of the results diagrammed in Table 2).

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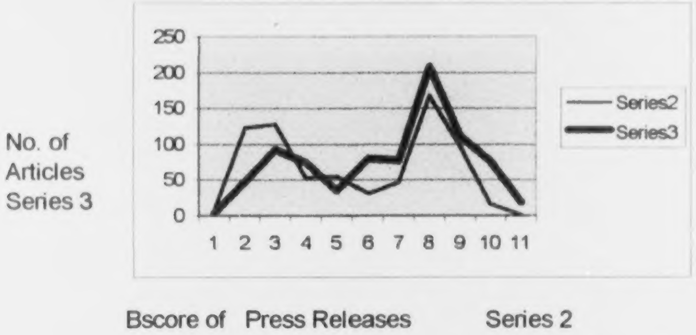
* Microsoft Excel Office 97 was used to run all statistical tests and graphs.

Figure 3 Bscore 1.0 to 3.0



Series 2 on the graph represents each possible Bscore. The possibilities exist for 11 different Bscores: 1.0, 1.2, 1.4, 1.6, 1.8, 2.0, 2.2, 2.4, 2.6, 2.8, 3.0. (See Table 1 for measurement). In the figure above, there are two anomalies. 1) There are approximately 249 press releases that scored between 1.2 and 1.4 (considered low scores) that nevertheless amounted to 140 articles published. In going over the data, these press releases were derived from 23 departments (colleges/schools) of the university and scored low because they were announcements and not events. Forty-six of the articles pertained derived out of press releases issued about students or administration news. Twenty articles pertained to engineering and medicine; and 20 articles pertained to biology, English and geography disciplines. The USC visitor's center ended up with 20 published articles and Black History garnered seven articles. The rest of the articles are spread out with one to two devoted to areas of art, theatre, McKissick Museum, and various others.

2) A second anomaly is shown when a Bscore of 1.8 of 55 press releases only garners 35 articles; hence, we see a drop in number 5 on the figure above. A review of the data discloses that in most of the press releases the weakness was in either the dimension of strength (content) where the lowest score of 1 was given because the release

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contained an announcement; or in immediacy (time) where again the lowest score of 1 was given because the release contained no time frame. While the other subpart of *strength* dimension, as active content, and *number* dimension as one source or event mentioned and the other subpart of *immediacy*, local news were rated either 2 or 3 each, the overall score ended up almost at the average 1.9. But the ultimate newsworthiness was decided by the press and few articles generated.

The best fit on Figure 3 above is between scores of 2.2 and 2.8. In fact, there were 472 articles published in this range of the Bscore. A clear relationship exists between rising scores and increasing number of articles published. A complete listing of the scores and articles is shown below in Table 4.

Table 5.

Bscore	#Press Releases with this score	#Articles this score generated	%
1.0	8	3	.375
1.2	122	48	.393
1.4	127	92	.724
1.6	53	74	100.396
1.8	55	35	.636
2.0	30	80	200.666
2.2	46	77	100.673
2.4	167	208	100.245
2.6	97	111	100.144
2.8	16	76	400.750
3.0	1	18	1800.000
2.0 Average	722 total press releases	822 total articles	

3) A third anomaly is indicated by the data is in the 232 press releases (spread out across the disciplines) that scored above 2.0 but did not generate articles. Of the 500 articles generated by press releases with a Bscore of 2.0 and higher, actually 125 of them account for the 500 articles generated. To determine whether tests are significant, we can use standard tables of values that Babbie (1995) suggests permits us to determine "whether a given association is statistically significant and at what level" (p.439). The following (Table 5) shows the tests performed between groups of press releases and Bscores. (SD .54): All tests indicate a low sampling error ($p<.05$).

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Table 6 Goodness-of-fit tests

Method	Chi-Square	DF	Pvalue
Pearson's	25.284	9	.003
Deviance	25.824	9	.002
Hosmer-Lemeshow	17.823	5	.003

The goodness-of-fit tests of chi-square are used to determine if there is a statistical significance in the observed relationship, according to Babbie (1995, p.438). Babbie states that the higher the chi-square value, the less probable it is that the value could be attributed to sampling error alone (1995, p.439). The table above shows that for 9 degrees of freedom three tests of chi-square produce high chi-square values, which all show that the probability of obtaining a chi square of these magnitudes is less than .004 or l/4th of 1%. The relationship then between Bscores and press releases is statistically significant at the .003 level (sampling error alone).

In a regression test, the question was asked, is the probability of at least one article being generated a linear function of the Bscore? When a *z test* was performed, the outcome was a 3.5 with a p-value of less than .01, giving a high confidence in the accuracy of the Bscore. In a logistic regression test, to measure the function of the Bscore on the press release, the odds ratio was 1.71. This means that as the Bscore increases by one unit (1.0-2.0) the odds of that press release with a score of 2 is 1.71 times greater than a press release with a Bscore of 1. Hence, the regression test supports the Bscore's trend upward (Figure1) already discussed. Again, *H1* was supported.

Newsworthiness and the code for the Bscore are one and the same. The basic premise of this study is to adapt a statistical measure to newsworthiness. The beauty of dynamic social impact theory is that it can be re-coded. For example, a researcher might want to take a sample of press releases and code them based on other options:

Strength = lead in first, second, third paragraph
Number = total length of words/paragraphs
Immediacy = location of the event in miles

Recommendations

In re-coding the score, the only dimension that might be revised is number. While Latané focuses on number of sources the number dimension could also focus on number of days of an event. In other words, a conference that is going to last a month with multiple sessions that may be open to the public will probably be more newsworthy than a one-day conference. The reseacher did not take this aspect into consideration although in the former example, a month-long conference would be coded a multiple sources. Perhaps a break-down specifically in number of actual days of an event will bring about some significance. If this were tried, then the sub-parts of each dimension would be equalized. Strength in the Bscore has two subparts, as does immediacy. Number has only one sub-part and therefore in order to equalize the subparts, the five subparts must be added when scored, and then averaged. Were each dimension to be of equal parts, averaging would not be necessary.

The real strength of the Bscore is really yet to be found. The possibilities for further studies and revisions are, for the researcher, infinite. More studies will bring about more usage and more suggestions for revisions. The strength of the code for the Bscore will always reside in the strength of the dynamic social impact theory.

The findings from the quantitative component (analyses of 722 press releases) of the study are generalizable to all press releases. The significance rests in the theoretical components but with a *caveat* to future researchers to extend the Bscore code to include climate of communication. The climate could consist of exactly those dimensions found by Sallot, Steinfatt & Salwen (1998) in their study of perceptions of news values between journalists and public relations practitioners. Besides the attempt to decide what constitutes news values, the researchers also found that problems exist in perceptions when it pertains to fairness of the press, promptness in getting news items to editors and accuracy and completeness in the material sent to the press. All of this can be especially problematic if there is only one newspaper in the area of the organization and that paper just doesn't seem to provide enough coverage.

In order to study the climate in this sample set, the next step would be the analysis of the 822 newspaper articles that were found linked to press releases during 1997 to determine if the reporters who wrote stories, or editors who sent the press releases to be published as briefs, were personally in contact with the media relations writers and to what extent. All diaried phone conversations would also have to be analyzed to determine if the reporters whose bylines appear in articles were also in contact with the Media Relations writers. In any case, some type of measurement of the relationship would have to be undertaken. Further analysis of the set of 232 press releases scoring a 2.0 and better that generated no press articles needs to be undertaken to determine if there were some things missed when scoring took place. One consideration that again pertains to climate is space availability on the part of the print media.

Not surprising in this study was that *The State* newspaper in Columbia provides most of the coverage for the university – 36% of the articles connected to the press releases were published by *The State* in Columbia, the main campus of the university (50% were published by the weekly papers around the state, 5% were published out of state and 9% were published by the other dailies in the state of South Carolina). *The State* also receives more press releases, daybooks and experts lists as well because of the local connection with the university. The editors and reporters who regularly deal with higher education news know the MR writers, many by sight. This would be surprising if it were not true. Nevertheless, according to Latané's DSI theory, such knowledge (closeness to sources) is crucial for social impact.

The Bscore reveals that when the right ingredients are put into information material, such as a press release, press coverage will ensue. How do the right ingredients get put into the press release? The ingredients are found in the dimensions of DSI theory – strength, number and immediacy as outlined in the coding of the Bscore. There is a particular beauty in putting a theory into operation, and the beauty of DSI theory is that it can be extended to include the communication element called "climate" or can be revised to include other sub-parts.

This study is really a beginning. The quantitative component of the study, analysis of press releases and the assignment of a scoring technique, is a step toward satisfying the goals of two groups, public relations practitioners and the press. It is an important step, since the study supports the notion that if a press release contains certain elements, it will probably generate press coverage. The Bscore dimensions based on DSI theory may not be enlightening to experienced public relations practitioners. They may already be fully aware of what it takes to produce a press release that attracts media attention. The scoring technique , however, can assist the practitioners in performing evaluations of an organizations' press releases and examine those releases that generated coverage but, more importantly, those releases that garnered no press coverage. Finally, the scoring technique can assist public relations/media relations people who are less experienced in the field. It can provide a yardstick that can be used to measure press releases before they are sent to the press and thereby provide a little more assurance in coping with the routine of writing releases.

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A systematic approach to analyzing the structure of news texts

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A systematic approach to analyzing the structure of news texts

Abstract: Despite increasing research examining media texts, there is no systematic approach to news discourse. This paper considers some of the issues raised by work in framing and discourse analysis and then suggests a systematic approach to analyzing media texts — such an approach could provide data that would be more useful for the development of theories about how the structure of news discourse influences audiences, authors and the texts themselves.

Within the field of journalism and mass communications research, one of the greatest ironies is how little actual media texts are studied. Studies have instead tended to focus on the production of news or, more frequently, the reception and effect of the media. To the extent that variation in media texts has been evaluated, scholars have tended to look at broad shifts in the subject or medium of the message.

This pattern dates back to some of the earliest quantitative studies in the field. The seminal work by Lazarsfeld et al. (1944), for example, asked respondents which candidates' messages they had heard (subject) and by which media. Subsequent research has tended to follow this model, developing careful and systematic measures of "exposure" and "attention" to texts but paying relatively little attention to variation in the texts themselves.

Fortunately, not all research in the field has neglected variation in texts. At its core, agenda setting asks how differences in the subjects covered in the media affect the degree of importance attributed to those subjects by audiences (McCombs & Shaw, 1997). Somewhat related to this investigation is work in media framing, which has looked not only at the topics contained in the media but also at the way those topics are presented.

Nevertheless, systematic work that evaluates media texts has remained uncommon. In the following paper, I will address some of the existing work and the research possibilities it suggests. Then I will propose a more systematic way of evaluating not only the content but also the structural form of news texts. This proposal relies upon evaluating texts in terms of six aspects. In suggesting these aspects, as well as proposing specific measures by which to evaluate them, this paper aims at allowing researchers to gather more theoretically useful data. Even though researchers have begun to look at the details of texts, they have rarely provided measures that would allow text structures to be compared across topics. Any complete theory of the interaction of text structure, language, production and reception cannot be formed until a thorough and systematic means of evaluating all these areas, including "frames" or broad structures, is adopted.

Literature review

In order to propose a universal approach to evaluating texts, it's important to first understand existing work dealing with text structure and language. Many existing studies raise important issues about the nature of texts and the ways they interact with audiences as well as the ways in which they are created. A comprehensive approach to news texts should be able to account for the theoretical possibilities raised by much of this work, providing data that could potentially confirm or deny some of these theories.

Although a large number of media theories deal at some level with texts, there are two areas that have dealt with the shape of texts as a primary focus. Previously mentioned work in framing is probably the most common currently, and it is certainly tied to many prominent theoretical ideas within the field. Any theory that takes into account processing behaviors by readers has to take into account the nature of the text being processed. Another area of research has provided deeper insights into the complex shapes of texts themselves, however. This research is less clearly defined, but it is often referred to as "discourse analysis." Understanding the attempts to describe media discourse within both of these fields should indicate much of what my systematic approach tries to address.

Discourse analysis is intimately tied to linguistics and extends far beyond the field of media research. In fact, basic texts on such analysis tend to avoid "applied" areas such as journalism, instead preferring to evaluate relatively simple, interpersonal texts (such as conversations, phone messages and e-mail) (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos, 1997). Nevertheless, whether used to evaluate texts created around the dinner table or in *The New York Times*, discourse analysis is largely an attempt to find meaningful patterns within the text.

When applied to media texts, discourse analysis has typically looked for categories of linguistic practices that are used by reader and author alike to organize and understand the presented information. Van Dijk (1988), in proposing a comprehensive analysis of news texts, suggests a range of categories into which the various parts of a news story fall. Furthermore, he argues that there is a relationship between these categories and the cognitive processes by which authors and readers structure information — thematically central information within the text is also central to the author's understanding of the story, for example.

Unfortunately, there is little agreement on what these categories are. Whereas van Dijk (1985) creates tree diagrams featuring such categories as "episode," "background" and "context" , Gerbner (1985, p. 20) provides a schema that evaluates elements of "existence, importance, values and relationships." In some ways, Gerbner's efforts to create a systematic method of content analysis are more comprehensive than van Dijk's examination of certain structural elements, and Gerbner's schema specifically includes measures of structure. Nevertheless, many applied efforts within discourse analysis have tended to move away from such macro-textual concerns into micro-textual evaluations of syntactical and lexical choices on the part of text authors. For example, Fowler (1991), while providing a fairly comprehensive listing of typical linguistic categories as they exist within news texts, clearly focuses on questions of word choice, sentence arrangement and (interestingly) typography.

Although such micro-textual analyses are potentially informative, they stray considerably from the general structural issues laid out by early theorists in media discourse. Furthermore, they are typically not presented in such a way as to allow research into variation in language use within the media. This is not to say such a process couldn't take place. As work being done within sociolinguistics demonstrates, it is entirely possible to correlate variation in all sorts of linguistic categories with variation in speakers (Chambers, 1995). There is no reason many of the categories presented by Fowler, particularly vocabulary, couldn't be correlated with both production and consumption aspects of the media; that connection simply hasn't been drawn in any comprehensive and systematic fashion.

Regardless, the important observation that comes from discourse analysis is that the language and structure of media texts act to constrain the shape of those texts (Bell, 1991). What observations by van Dijk and others begin to suggest is that the content and structure of media discourse is constrained not only by the news gathering environment but also by the "rules" of news discourse itself. Although an understanding of social and economic constraints on the production and processing of news texts remains important, a structural analysis of media discourse should also provide measures of patterns intrinsic to the discourse itself, thereby allowing us to map and understand the role those patterns play in the mass communication process.

Unfortunately, most recent analysis of media texts has moved away from an understanding of language as a self-structuring phenomenon. On the other hand, recent analysis of "frames" within media texts has gone a long way toward providing measures of language use that can be meaningfully correlated to attitudes held by text recipients. Alas, the various definitions of "framing" make it difficult to compare results across studies.

Existing summaries of framing research have tended to lament the "fractured" nature of the field (Entman, 1993) or divide the field into various typologies (Pan and Kosicki, 1993). Although these overviews give some sense of the variety of work being done in the field, they do little to explain how disparate definitions of "frames" can be consolidated into a meaningful theory of framing. The recent explosion in work on framing has only complicated this field.

In general, recent studies tend to define frames in one of two ways. Either they are seen as general organizing structures for a news story (or series of stories) or they are seen as the specific "spins" actors within a story put on their version of events. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) clearly view frames as structural elements when they discuss the discourse of nuclear power, for example. Sadly, this account, like similar structural approaches, does little to provide a method of analysis across content areas — the organizing frames provided by the authors are often specific to the topic being explored. Shah et al. (1996) make an admirable attempt to provide for more generalizable frames in their experiments demonstrating a relationship between "ethical" and "material" frames within news stories and the decision-making processes of readers. Still, the bulk of work on structural frames tends to be topic-specific and unrelated to linguistic practices.

The difficulties are only compounded by the existence of a second concept of frames — a specific "slant" on a story contained within the larger structure of a news text. When Jasperson et al. (1998) evaluate the presence of frames on stories dealing with the budget deficit, their computerized analysis of word proximity would seem to generate a count of individual frames within a larger story. More so than the structural analysis of frames, this approach would seem to capture what the authors describe as the second level of agenda setting — a connection between the frequency of certain interpretations of an issue within the media and the acceptance or understanding of that interpretation by the media consumer.

Resolving the two notions of frames is further complicated by confusion over the meaning of framing itself. In addition to existing at different levels within a story, framing can mean different things. Benford (1997) argues that framing (as metaphor and as theory) conveys both the sense of structural relationships between components of a text as well as the notion of a method by which components are included and excluded. Accordingly, it is difficult to summarize what is meant by framing, and the approach presented in this paper rejects that term in favor of more specific terms for a variety of textual aspects included under the broad category of framing.

It is possible to touch on what has been captured and what has been ignored in the literature on framing. The relationship between the structural aspects of language and the shape of news stories, so vital in discourse analysis, has largely eluded the work being done in framing. Furthermore, despite early ethnographic work that used the metaphor of framing to discuss media production (Tuchman, 1978), most recent work has tended to correlate frames only to media effects (particularly decision-making processes and perceived issue salience), if any external connections have been drawn at all. The increased interest in framing has, however, opened up analysis of media effects to textual aspects beyond content area and medium, with laudable results. As Iyengar (1991) has repeatedly demonstrated, the relationship between media content and various cognitive processes on the part of message recipients is real and complex, in part due to the way the structure of texts selects and highlights certain messages and content areas.

Structural analysis of news texts

The compelling results obtained from a variety of approaches to news discourse demonstrate both the existence and viability of a range of approaches. Nevertheless, as the preceding review of existing literature demonstrates, there are problems with some of the existing approaches. A new, systematic approach to analyzing texts must deal with these problems. Such an approach should allow for comparison across content areas, reducing the importance of topic-specific categories of analysis — for example, Menashe and Siegel's (1998) analysis of various frames in media coverage of tobacco may be useful in understanding that specific issue, but categories such as "non-smoker's rights" and "free speech/legal product" are of little use to researchers interested in other areas of the media or even other aspects of health policy. Although content-specific categories cannot be eliminated, their importance can be reduced by including other, standardized aspects of texts in the analysis.

Those other aspects should address some of the issues brought up by discourse analysis as well as other research into the production and use of media texts. Analysis should not only consider the relationship between content variation and effects but also that between structural and content variation and between variation in producers and in the texts they produce. Research along those lines would provide more universally applicable (and therefore theoretically useful) data as well as potential insights into the way the structure of discourse helps shape media texts and their impacts.

With these considerations in mind, I propose that media texts be analyzed in terms of six important aspects: What claims are being made in a text?; Who is making those claims?; How do the claims relate to the structure of the news story?; Where are the claims located within the news story?; Where are the claims located relative to other claims?; and What language is being used to present the claims?

In the remainder of this article, I will consider the theoretical rationale behind each of these components as well as the specific measures that might be used to evaluate them. Furthermore, I will suggest ways in which each component relates to the others and to existing theory. Finally, I will draw upon examples from a specific news text (see appendix) to demonstrate the analytical process.

What claims are being made?

Claims are closely related to the second notion of frames discussed in the literature review — specific approaches to a subject provided by actors and contained within a larger story. Categorizing claims requires an understanding of the issue being discussed within the story or stories under analysis — the range of possible claims is the range of viewpoints being presented within the issue. As much as possible, these viewpoints should be divided into general categories representing sets of related propositions about the issue.

In many ways claims are both the most and least problematic of the six categories. Despite my earlier caveat, the classification of frames still requires issue-specific analysis. In some ways, this would appear to thwart efforts to create an analytical method that would allow comparison of variation across content areas. On the other hand, because it relies upon issue-specific categories, the notion of claims is closely tied to most existing framing research and therefore easily applicable to work in that field.

To some extent, issue-specific analysis is both inevitable and desirable. There is no question that the range of possible approaches to a topic, as well as the approaches within that range that are selected for inclusion by the media, are important to understanding the subject being studied. Textual analysis is used to gain an understanding of a political or social subject as much as it is intended to gain an understanding of the media process; furthermore, different topic areas may be approached and understood in drastically different ways by both message producers and consumers. Rejecting any topic-specific categories would prevent any sort of topic-specific understanding.

Nevertheless, there are two ways in which the analysis of claims within this schema can be used to gain a more general understanding of media discourse. First, patterns may begin to emerge in the sorts of claims that are used in texts. If we define and evaluate claims consistently, research is more likely to reveal consistent patterns in the types of claims articles contain — such patterns might be related to the "framing" types (ethical, material) proposed in the Shah et al. article described earlier. Second, it is important to remember that claims are not the only thing being analyzed in this approach. They are instead evaluated in conjunction with other aspects of media texts, making it easier to see patterns in both claim types and media discourse as a whole.

Because claims are closely tied to existing research approaches, the theoretical justification for analyzing them should be fairly clear. The concept of claims is tied to a vast body of research concerning both inputs and outputs of media texts. On the input side, a systematic measurement of claims would provide one test for a variety of theories concerning media constraints. If, as numerous scholars have suggested, certain messages (namely those tied to the dominant ideology of society) are more likely to find their way into the media, this should manifest itself in quantifiable ways within texts (examples of constraint theories include Bagdikian, 1992; Gandy, 1982; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). On the output side, claims are clearly linked to agenda setting and "typical" framing theories. Media texts do appear to determine (in part) what issues are ranked as salient in decision making by readers (Iyengar & Simon, 1993). If we count which claims appear more or less frequently within texts, we will have some idea of what issues are being pushed to the top of the agenda for the topic in question.

Obviously, if the types of claims to be coded for vary according to topic, it is impossible to specify them in this context. General guidelines to claims can be presented, however, and these guidelines should allow comparison in text structure between different topics. Claims should fall into discreet categories, each of which represents a philosophically coherent understanding of a topic. For example, in articles on the economic cost of logging, one category might be claims that logging's costs are transparent and accurately reflected in U.S. Forest Service accounting (see appendix). Another category of claims might be that costs are not accurately reflected by such accounting due to dishonest or inaccurate practices on the part of the Forest Service. And yet another category might be that economic principles are incapable of reflecting the price of environmental damage and that debates over the monetary cost of logging are therefore irrelevant or even harmful.

Not all claims are easily categorized, of course. Analysts should remain open to the possibility that they have not accounted for all possible categories of claims. They should also work to make very explicit the boundaries of categories. Furthermore, it may help to remember that each paragraph in a news story, due to the conventions of journalistic writing, will usually represent a single claim. Finally, nearly all claims will include some kind of warrant, a piece of evidence (however weak) backing the advocacy of the claim.

There are exceptions to these typical advocacy claims, and they come in two kinds. First, for every claim there is the possibility of a direct refutation of that claim, an "anti-claim" if you will. For example, the Forest Service denial of an environmentalist claim (paragraph seven) represents such an anti-claim. It doesn't not present any aspect of a philosophically coherent position; instead, it simply refutes a coherent claim. There is a subtle distinction between a claim that refutes another claim and a merely contradictory claim. Paragraph three and paragraph nine represent contradictory claims. The third paragraph falls into the category of claims that Forest Service costs are open and accurate — this is the "first time" a loss has existed, expenditures are consistently "reported" and the loss is only "$14.7 million." The ninth paragraph, on the other hand, represents the claim that accounting methods are inaccurate and even dishonest. The Forest Service relies up "tricks to hide the loses," in part by "not count[ing]" certain expenditures. Each position could and does exist on its own — individuals do not need to hold one belief for the other to be tenable. On the other hand, the claim in paragraph seven would be meaningless unless it refuted the claim in paragraphs five and six. The importance of such anti-claims is unclear, but accounting for it in analyses could help determine if readers and authors treat them differently than coherent claims. For example, is the position of a group weakened in the perception of text consumers if that group's claims are primary in refutation?

The other type of claim is a "neutral" claim that does explicitly advocate a position. This is not to say that such claims do not have philosophical importance or that the warrants contained in such claims do not affect audience opinions. Rather, it is simply that as worded, the claims do not take a position on the issue at hand. The tenth paragraph is a good example of this — as positioned in the article, there is no reason the amount of timber sold by the government would affect the validity of accounting methods or the cost of selling timber. Obviously, this information could be used in an advocacy claim; an environmental group might suggest the amount of timber sold demonstrates the reluctance on the part of the Forest Service to development non-timber-based policies. But in the context of the story, this is a neutral claim.

Again, there is no firm rule as to how many categories of claims there are, how narrowly or broadly to set the boundaries of those categories or how to resolve differences between coders. These are things that, to some extent, will vary depending on the subject and the goal of the research. Overall, though, if future analysis of texts evaluates claims as defined in this proposal and connects these claims to some of the other important aspects, the data provided should allow development of theories beyond those facilitated in current research.

Who is making the claims?

Although probably the most researched aspect of news texts, claims are also the most complex. The remaining five aspects are simpler to categorize and explain, although they are no less important. Furthermore, all five aspects are coded according to universal standards that should not shift from topic to topic. Because these are universal categories, analysis of variation in these categories across topic areas, authors and effects should prove extremely fruitful.

The first such set of universal categories applies to the people making claims, the actors in a news text. Although actors have received little attention in evaluations of media effects, they are probably the most important focus of studies that look into the production of media texts. For example, Tuchman (1978) argues that journalists rely upon a web of known sources, while Herman and Chomsky (1988) suggest that elite sources rely upon "flak" to punish those journalists who turn to sources and claims that differ from mainstream ideologies. Similarly, Gandy (1982) claims that sources subsidize certain kinds of information by making it less expensive for journalists, both in terms of money and time spent retrieving it. As was the case with theories of constraints concerning claims, constraints on the actors available to journalists can, in part, be tested by a systematic analysis of which actors actually appear in news stories, especially if the number and range of actors within mainstream texts is compared to other catalogs of available sources, such as alternative media. Additionally, despite a relative lack of research on the subject, there is no reason to believe that actors have no influence on the ways claims are received. A systematic study of the types of actors who appear in certain stories would allow for correlation of variation in actors not only with production of texts but also with variation in the ways texts are received. For example, are texts with fewer privileged actors (i.e. "elite" sources) less likely to be perceived by readers as truthful or useful?

Actors are simply defined as the source given for a claim. These may be people, groups or even documents. If no source is given, such as the claim about the amount of timber sold in paragraph ten of the sample story, or if the source is the journalist themselves (some form of personal observation) then the source is the text author. Otherwise, authors fall into one of several categories: Government — any officials associated with a public body; business — anyone explicitly related to the management and operation of a business (such as Frank Stewart in paragraph eleven, because of the mention of industry); activist — any group that works (outside of business or government) to achieve certain political and social goals (this would include unions, as well as the environmental groups mentioned in the article); media — other media sources (for example, the Washington Post article cited in the story); unaffiliated experts — for example, members of the academy, who are seen not as associated with a group involved in the issue but are seen as possessing unique and privileged knowledge about the situation. Depending on the topic being studied, the scholars may find it useful to subdivide one or more of these categories. For example, there might be an important distinction between politicians and professional bureaucrats, or between pro- and anti-choice abortion activists. Mostly, it is important that data be gathered and presented in such a way that analyses can be consolidated into broad categories matching or similar to those presented in this paragraph, thus allowing for a useful comparison between the findings in a study in which sub-categories of actors might be important and a study in which such subdivisions are irrelevant. Two final categories are also important: affected and unaffected individuals. These groups are distinguished by the fact that they are associated only with a broad public (in the case of unaffected individuals) or with a narrower social group somehow affected by the debate (for example, a logger in the case of debates over timber). Typically, these individuals are not seen as having any special insight into the situation, even if they are directly and immediately affected by it. Many theorists suggest that such individuals are far less likely to receive positive coverage (or any coverage) from the media despite the useful knowledge they might have, due in part to the constraints on news gathering (Eliasoph, 1998). Again, by using the proposed categories, this proposition could be tested by a systematic analysis.

How do the claims fit into the structure of the text?

Although this is probably the most vital aspect of structural analysis, it is also the least explored within the existing literature. Despite numerous framing studies that claimed to deal with the way news discourse was structured, the reality is that such discussions tended to focus more on the acceptable range of claims within a text than on the actual linguistic techniques used to arrange news stories. This aspect does not deal with the "real" relationship between different claims but rather with the relationship implied by the structuring language used in the text. This is an important distinction. A successful analysis of this aspect (and the narrative structure of a news text) should not simply group the claims contained within a text into a category and label the story's structure accordingly — this would provide a meaningless measure, since the types of claims are already represented by analysis of the claims themselves.

Instead, narrative structure is closely related to the concept of ideology. Like framing, this is a term that has various definitions and is accordingly problematic. Following in part the model proposed by van Dijk (1998), I argue that ideology is neither a set of individual beliefs nor a hegemonic set of beliefs enforced upon an entire society. Instead, an ideology is a widely held "map" of acceptable beliefs and the relationships between them. This notion of ideology is conceptually important because it illustrates the possibility that some beliefs are more likely to be held within a given ideology and that some ideas are related to other ideas within a given ideology (regardless of the logic behind that relationship — consider the common link between free-market capitalism and social conservatism). In this sense, ideology is intimately related to the structural practices of language (and rationally so, given the wealth of analysis suggesting that it is through language use that individuals and society structure their beliefs and ideological systems).

Finding empirical evidence to support the concept of ideology at a societal level is both difficult and fairly meaningless; ideology is more useful as a model of the way beliefs are organized than an actual set of ideas that could be somehow mapped and documented. Within news texts, however, the ideological structure can be measured. If some degree of "ideology" exists in news discourse, there ought to be patterns in the syntactic and structural arrangement of that discourse. In short, claims ought to be linguistically tied not simply because of their "rational" relationship but because of some discursive, potentially ideological structure that helps shape news texts.

Measuring the role each claim plays in the structure is simply a matter of determining how the claim is related to other claims within the text. Typically, the general arrangement of claims is set in the lead paragraph of a news story; reporters distinguish between, for example, one-sided announcements and two-sided debates. Identifying the relationship of each claim to that structure is simply a matter of evaluating the language used to introduce and relate the claim to other claims. Although this could be done in a number of ways, this paper proposes a standardized, quantifiable measure of structure to facilitate using this analysis in conjunction with other measures. Under this standardized approach, stories are broken into a number of sides, where each side represents a series of linguistically linked claims.

All stories include at least one side — a neutral, informational side. Typically, this side contains the neutral claims I previously described, although depending on the story nearly any claim could fall into this side. The neutral side contains all claims that are not positioned as being part of a debate or argument — regardless of whether the claims actually constitute advocacy or not. In the sample story, the tenth paragraph describing total government timber sales falls into the neutral side — there is no language linking it to any of the other sides in the story or to any sort of unique advocacy. In some stories, for example most obituaries, there is only one side, even though some of that information could constitute an advocacy claim. If a dead woman is described as a "skilled artist" there is likely nothing in the language of the obituary that would treat that as anything other than a fact. However, if a living artist is described in an article on a gallery opening as skilled, the language of the story will likely structure this as representing an opinion — a non-neutral side, in other words.

A story can contain anywhere from zero to hundreds of distinct non-neutral sides. In most cases, they contain only one or two. In the example of the gallery opening story, there might be several claims about the artist's skill that clearly constitute a side, but there might be no opposing claims that are presented as a separate side. So long as the language introducing a claim suggests that it supports an existing side, the new claim is also a part of that side (even in cases where the language of the claim itself may not seem to support that side). Such language could include phrases such as "X agrees with that assessment," "one indication of this is ...," "Y concurs, saying," or it could include a clear linkage between actors (for example, if Y "also of group X" was quoted, we could assume they represented the same side). Or, the continuity of a statement could indicate that two claims were linked; for example, the fourth paragraph in the sample story refers to "this pattern" from the third paragraph and contains the pronoun "he". Because the author uses language that requires reading information from the third graph into the fourth, in the absence of contradictory language, we can safely place both of these onto the same side.

Not all language is supporting, of course. The fifth paragraph of the sample story is plainly opposed to the fourth, using language such as "charged" (indicating it is not part of the neutral side) and "actually," suggesting a contradiction between the two claims. In this case, we have another side coming into existence. In many, but not all, cases, two claims that are both opposed to the same side will themselves both be part of the same side. However, this is not necessarily the case — it is important to examine the language carefully. Ideally, linked claims will use supporting language (for example, the "long" in the ninth paragraph, which implies a continuity with other claims of a similar nature cited in the story and thus with the side those claims were a part of). Still, oppositional language is an important indication of claims; examples of such language might include statements such as "Z opposes," "B group has long disagreed with this policy" or "many scientists are skeptical."

It is important to remember that the key is the language connecting claims, not the reasoning of the claims themselves. For example, the last paragraph of the sample story clearly places the blame for increasing timber costs on bureaucratic practices by the government — as a claim, it falls into the same category as the fourth paragraph of the story. Structurally, however, there is no language linking it to anything else in the story; I would code this as a distinct side within the story. In another story on the same subject, the last paragraph used referential language, explaining an actor was "not commenting specifically on the contents of the memo." There, language links the claim to earlier claims by other Forest Service officials about the memo; here, while philosophically similar, the claim is structurally free from earlier claims. Conversely, the third and fourth paragraphs, described above as part of the same side, make different categories of claims; one is about the openness and accuracy of the accounting methods, while the other is about the source of financial loss. Yet structurally these are linked as part of the same side.

In my view, these structural measures are the most important of the six attributes. Largely, this is because they have been poorly examined in the existing research. Unfortunately, the shortage of research into textual structure also makes it difficult to speculate on how variation in structure might affect readers or be affected by writers. If structure does in fact represent the ideology contained within the story, however, it could be a fruitful area of study. Potentially, the way audiences relate various opinions could be affected by the structure of news stories; the resources available for oppositional readings could be provided and also restricted by the shape of the media discourse. Additionally, the process by which reporters select claims could be shaped by the self-perpetuating ideology of the story — as the story develops, it may be the claims that adopt themselves to the structure rather than the structure shifting to account for the range of claims. All of this is mere speculation, of course, but it suggests why analysis of news structure, particularly in conjunction with the other attributes described in this paper, could prove valuable.

Where does the claim appear in the article?

Compared to earlier measures, this one is remarkably simple. What paragraph does the claim appear in? Van Dijk (1988) argues that claims which are more central to the theme of the story tend to appear closer to the beginning of the story. Furthermore, he demonstrates that people are more likely to recall information that was part of that central theme and located close to the top of the story. If the prevalence of claim types within a set of stories is being used as a predictor of audience beliefs, accounting for the position of that claim within the story could greatly increase the accuracy of such predictions.

Where does the claim appear relative to other claims?

This attribute is closely related to both the general structure of the story and the way in which claims are sorted (top to bottom) in the story. Independently, this is simply a matter of determining whether a claim appears near other, similar claims and whether actors appear near other, similar actors. Measuring this would allow some understanding of whether messages gain or lose persuasive power when they appear near supporting and opposing messages.

By tying this to the preceding two attributes, we can begin to thoroughly map the overall structure of a news story, independent of the information contained within. Not only could a researcher test whether certain topics were more likely to elicit certain structures and whether structures emerged as dominant over time (as suggested by Jamieson and Capella (1998) in their examination of media coverage of the health care debate) but also how the structure of a news story and type of a claim and actor appear to influence the placement of claims within a text. Are certain actors or certain claims more likely to appear by themselves, near the bottom of a story? Are those claims and actors typically left unconnected to the dominant side(s) in a news story? Are these patterns related to the type of issue being reported? To the experience of the reporter? Do they appear to influence audience perceptions of the issue? By providing standardized measures of the structure of news stories as well as the components (claims and actors) that fall into that structure, this methodological proposal hopes to make is easier for researchers to produce data that could help answer some of these questions.

What sort of language is used to present the claim?

This last attribute is a potentially massive category, and it receives little attention here because this article is primarily intended to encourage a more standardized approach to textual analysis by media researchers, rather than to encourage linguists to conduct more research on media texts. An enormous amount of information about next texts could be obtained if only a small number of researchers conducted studies that included the measures already listed. Adding standardized examinations of the specific language used in the media would only enhance the richness of that information.

Furthermore, issues of language use are included here with a note of caution. Too often, evaluation of language has been connected to a highly non-standard approach. While these studies have often been insightful, they provide data that is almost useless to researchers hoping to make generalizations about patterns in news texts. For example, Fowler's (1991) book on "Language in the News" raises a vast number of linguistic fields that could provide valuable insight into the shape of news texts. Unfortunately, the work done by Fowler is somewhat inconsistent; syntactic and lexical choices are highlighted (or ignored) as they fit into the argument being made. This doesn't mean the argument is wrong, but it does mean there is little data to relate to other observed patterns in texts, audiences or reporters.

The stigma of linguistic investigation as inconsistent is unfortunate. So too is the (less frequent) stigma of quantitative linguistic investigation as pointlessly tedious and obsessed with minute details. A systematic investigation of vocabulary in news stories, for example, may not indicate very much by itself. But in conjunction with other measures (such as those presented elsewhere in this paper) it could provide useful insight into how texts are constructed and understood; it might be, for example, that variations in vocabulary help explain why certain claims are more likely to appear in news stories. The question of what gives a claim cognitive power (an issue insightfully raised by Schudson (1989)) is largely unanswered; addressing that issue will require some understanding of the differences in language use between claims (as well as considerable use of psycholinguistics).

Clearly, the various fields within applied linguistics provide for a vast number of potential measures. Rather than attempting to proscribe what measures might be most useful or describing the range of available fields, this paper will merely suggest a couple possible avenues of research that could particularly be informative in conjunction with the measures already provided.

Obviously, questions of vocabulary are both easily answered and infinitely valuable, if combined with other measures and treated as a variable. It is the treatment of language use as variable that is key. Merely stating that minorities are treated unfavorably in the press is inadequate. Rather, researchers should be able to chart differences in the type of vocabulary used to describe different ethnic groups and then compare those shifts in vocabulary to shifts in the likelihood members of the group will be actors in news stories, to the types of claims about those groups included in news stories, and to the way news stories structure and position those claims and actors.

Similarly, syntactic observations should not merely note patterns; they should demonstrate variance in the syntax used in news stories. If agents are typically left out of stories about state-sponsored violence, that should be compared to stories about other types of violence. Furthermore, it should be linked to other measures of news texts — for example, does the lack of agency imply that state actors are also less likely to appear in such stories? Finally, in any analysis of language variance, it should be possible to compare such variance to differences in the people producing and consuming the news. For example, are minority reporters less likely to use "derogatory" vocabulary in describing members of their minority? Is that the only difference, or do they also structure their stories differently? Do minorities use minority actors more frequently? And do any of these differences affect audience opinions about minorities? Or state-sponsored violence? Or any other subject under investigation?

Conclusions

Many of the measures suggested in the proposed methodology have been used before, and many of the questions raised have been investigated. Existing work on framing, in particular, is designed in part to answer questions about the impact certain structures have on the audience. The problem, as mentioned in the literature review, is that these measures have been inconsistent and have usually only looked at one or two of the six attributes described above.

Each of the six attributes has potential theoretical implication when considered as a variable unto itself. Furthermore, each of them can and should be compared not only to production and consumption but also (and especially) variation within the text. This possibility — comparing various components of the structure of texts in a meaningful fashion — is the first advantage of a standardized examination of textual structure in the manner proposed. The second advantage is the possibility of comparing data across studies, thereby granting us a better understanding not only of how texts interact with their creators and readers but also of how the discursive rules of news affect the texts themselves.

A single study of most or all of the six attributes, in the manner suggested, even without any outside measures, would provide some insight into the particular topic under investigation. More important, however, is the fact that such a study, when combined with others and when designed to include other measures, would allow us to build a more comprehensive theory about the relationship between discursive structure and the entire media process, a relationship that in turn has significant implications for the shape of society as a whole.

Appendix

November 21, 1997
By SCOTT SONNER, Associated Press Writer

(1) The Forest Service is acknowledging for the first time that taxpayers are losing money logging national forests.

(2) A draft of a report due out next month says the government spent nearly $ 15 million more on the logging operations than private timber companies paid to purchase the wood in fiscal 1996.

(3) "For the first time since we have reported such information, expenditures for the program as a whole exceeded revenues ... by some $ 14.7 million," Robert Joslin, deputy chief of the Forest Service said in a copy of the draft obtained Friday by The Associated Press.

(4) "This pattern can be expected to continue in the future as we place more and more emphasis on using timber sales as a management tool for achieving objectives other than fiber production," he said.

(5) Environmentalists charged that the agency actually reached the conclusion months ago but kept it secret while Congress debated and narrowly defeated proposals this fall to slow construction of logging roads.

(6) "They've known this since March," said Michael Francis, a former congressional aide now at The Wilderness Society. "They have been sitting on the numbers for their own political reasons."

(7) Forest Service officials denied that.

(8) The Washington Post first reported Friday on a Forest Service memo outlining the losses.

(9) Environmentalists long have accused the Forest Service of using accounting tricks to hide the losses. For example, the Forest Service does not count as a cost the one-fourth of timber sale receipts that are returned to rural counties housing the forests. That mounted to $ 240 million in 1996.

(10) The government sold 3.7 billion board feet of timber from national forests last year.

(11) "The administration has taken a profitable program and made it unprofitable for the taxpayers," said Frank Stewart, spokesman for the industry's American Forest & Paper Association. He blamed it on "all the red tape this program has to go through."

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Setting the Proximity Frame:

Distance As an Affective Attribute in Reporting Terrorism Events

by

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Setting the Proximity Frame:
Distance As an Affective Attribute in Reporting Terrorism Events

Introduction

Proximity is a long-held axiom of news. Along with the overwhelming or commanding importance or prominence of a story, how close subjects are to a story when it takes place is an important characteristic in whether the story is considered news. A house fire in Polo, Illinois is generally of little interest to the citizens of Atlanta, Georgia. But if that fire were a few miles down the road in Dixon, Illinois and destroyed a childhood home of former President Ronald Reagan, the nation would be told about the incident. Prominence now takes the front row seat in the story.

Yet, should we now dismiss proximity as a factor in this story? How would the reporting of the story differ from Dixon to Atlanta? If distance can dictate whether a story is important enough to be considered news; might it also be capable of shaping not only the scope, but the tenor of the news coverage?

Shaping the description of news events is a notion best conceptualized in relationship to the framing process. Does this mean then that proximity is potentially a contributing factor to our understanding of overarching framing concepts? Ghanem suggests that "one of the weaknesses of most framing studies is that the attributes of the issue or topic are not generalizable across issues." Evaluating proximity, a basic tenet of news, should provide some direction in the attempt to overcome this weakness. This research specifically examines the value of proximity in the framing dimension of affective attributes.[1]

Few studies have attempted to foster the notion of proximity outside of the routine borders of the regional newspaper or television station. Fewer studies still have examined distance in both a cross-national and framing manner. This research then begins the process of moving proximity to a generalizable attribute of framing.

English-speaking nations have both similarities and differences in their cultural lives, and how they view the news. Ensuring, therefore, that the study remains one of proximity differences rather than cultural differences is difficult, but not impossible. To minimize those difficulties, the research should identify the affective attributes of proximity through a common, relatively uncluttered and well-defined manner.[2]

The selection of distant, but similar countries for a test of the strength of proximity as an affective attribute frame in news coverage seems interesting. Selecting the United States and Great Britain provides direct access to similar print media reporting styles while establishing substantial physical distance in order to test this proximity notion. A two-nation study on dynamic and generally tragic events provides an understanding of the cross-national influences of this framing.[3]

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[1] Ghanem, S. (1997). *Filling in the Tapestry: The Second Level of Agenda Setting.* In *Communication and Democracy* (M. McCombs, D.L. Shaw and D. Weaver, eds). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

[2] Dogan, M. And Pelassy, D. (1990). *How to Compare Nations: Strategies in Comparative Politics. 2nd ed.* Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishing.

[3] Richard A. Pride, "How Activists and Media Frame Social Problems: Critical Events Versus Performance Trends for Schools," *Political Communication*, 12, (1995), 6.

This research examines the portrayal of two specific critical events by four elite newspapers, two in each nation, based on each newspaper's proximity to the event. Both acts in this research are instances of political violence. Events of a magnitude sufficient to warrant comparison between nations are sometimes difficult to ascertain. However, in instances of political violence, generally termed terrorism, the individual events often serve to provide instances which are covered sufficiently in each nation. The two events selected will be discussed in a moment.

How the proximity frame will manifest itself in both nearby and distant reporting of the terrorist acts is the thrust of this research. Specifically, it is expected that nearby reporting will tend to emphasize the criminal nature of the act while the political implications of the act will be the focus of reporting by distant media organizations. More simply: political talk and criminal action talk differentiate or set the tone of the proximity frame. It should be understood that the research does not compare political talk to criminal action talk, but rather compares how the newspapers of each nation choose to emphasize each category in their reporting. Measurement for this question will be based on a computerized content analysis of all stories related to the two specific events under study.

Background

Recent acts of terrorism in the United States have raised the awareness of the American people concerning the nature of terrorism. Yet, it appears that instances of terrorism in the U.S. are too infrequent for citizens to fear becoming victims of terrorism. There is scant evidence on the issue. While not inculcated into the thinking of Americans today, it is likely that continued acts of political or quasi-political violence in the U.S. could serve to heighten fears and thrust terrorism solidly onto the long term public agenda.

Today, we may portray terrorism as an issue on the rise. The Oklahoma City bombing of the Murro Federal building and the capture and conviction of the Unabomber have served to heighten the potential for increased salience of the issue.[4]

For this study, two events have been selected and the United States and Great Britain serve as investigative arenas. This comparative study then looks at critical events in two nations and through the "eyes" of the elite mass media. Content analysis allows researchers to examine an issue both from the perspective of counting topical events and from the perspective of issue attitude.

Comparing the United States and British Media

Friedland and Mengbai (1996) point out that "journalism is the first draft of history" and that comparative studies aid in our interpretation of history by giving us multiple frames of reference. The researchers point out that by comparing news coverage from different sources, we may be able to draw conclusions about the nature of news gathering and reporting in general.[5]

According to Blumler, Mcleod and Rosengren, there are three distinctive contributions to knowledge supplied through comparative research. The first is at the level of observation. "...comparative inquiry cosmopolitanizes, opening our eyes to communication patterns and problems unnoticeable in our own spatial and temporal milieux." The second is comparitivism's ability to "...overcome space- and time-bound limitations on the generalizability of our theories, assumptions and propositions." The third contribution is that only comparative studies are capable of providing analyses to "...explore and reveal the consequences of differences in how communication is organized at the macro societal level."[6]

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[4] For a discussion on issue salience see: S. Iyenger (1979). Television News and Issue Salience. *American Politics Quarterly, 7, 395-416.* And D.P. Demers, D. Craff, Y-H Choi and B.M. Pessin (1989). Issue Obtrusiveness and the Agenda-Setting Effects of National Network News. *Communication Research, 16, 6, 793-812.*

[5] Lewis A. Friedland and Zhong Mengbai, "International Television Coverage of Bejing Spring 1989: A Comparative Approach," *Journalism and Mass Communication Monographs*, 156 (April, 1996).

Blumler, et al suggest that more comparative studies are needed to ensure that we produce theories which can move across the spatial and temporal boundaries of traditional communication research.

Blumler, McLeod and Rosengren believe that "comparative research could be called the communication field's 'extended and extendable frontier.'" They report that as researcher's international contacts multiply in an ever-changing but increasingly global environment, it is necessary for researchers to reach across national and cultural borders to investigate communication phenomena. This study is designed to advance this area of research. [7]

Dogan and Pelassy explain that the role of comparative studies is to find commonality and isolate differences in discussions of the attributes of various social actors, groups, and organizations. The comparativist seeks to gain knowledge through reference beyond the limits of one environment. When comparing nations, we look for reference frames which will allow for the common explanation of actions/situations/ outcomes. This commonality, in turn, provides meaning and understanding of the now enlarged environment. Knowledge is extended.[8]

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[6] Jay G. Blumler, Jack M. McLeod, and Karl E. Rosengren, eds. *An Introduction to Comparative Communication Research*, in *Comparatively Speaking: Communication and Culture Across Time and Space* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992) 3-4.

[7] Blumler, McLeod and Rosengren, 3-4.

The media of different nations often cover the same issues differently. Ethnocentrism is a common factor cited in national reporting differences. The development of media historically will produce some cultural uniqueness within a nation. This culturally-driven uniqueness generally spawns some ethnocentric attitude which actually serves to increase the strength of the distance factor in a nation's news reporting. Therefore, proximity has two dimensions. The first dimension of proximity is geographic distance, the second dimension is a nation's culturally-driven bias towards nationalism. Each dimension will be explored in the research. Despite differences of geography and ethnocentrism, there are significant similarities in how news stories are gathered, written and disseminated.

How might we establish controls for this comparative study? The geographic distance in a study is controlled by the selection of the news outlets reporting the stories. Furthermore, controlling cultural differences is a process of winnowing language and style to a central and common understanding. A common language and the use of like-defined words and phrase syntax assist in this move towards commonality. Once achieved, the research is free to examine the geographic differences question more carefully.

Political Violence In this Study

Political violence has been relatively commonplace in Great Britain for more than 25 years

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[8] Ibid, Dogan & Pelassy, pp. 3-4.

(some might say 50 years or more). Nearly 250 acts of political violence were "experienced" by Great Britain and its environs between 1970 and 1992. Of those, 127 acts of violence occurred within Britain's island borders.[9] Most active among those groups targeting the British have been the Irish freedom/separatist groups known as PIRA (the Provisional Wing of the Irish Republican Army), the INLA (Irish National Liberation Army), the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and to a lesser extent, the IRA's "legal" arm, Sinn Fein.[10] Throughout much of the 1970s and 1980s, and now into the 90s, the three groups have fought a media war of one-upmanship in terrorist acts.

Second to the "Irish dimension" have been the Palestinians. Great Britain has been an attractive haven for Middle-Eastern political moderates and pro-westerners avoiding Palestinian retribution. The Palestinians have often worked in British territory to carry out acts of violence against individuals and groups who have appeared to be working to thwart the Palestinian goals of organizational recognition and ultimately, nationalism.[11]

From the perspective of the United States, modern acts of terrorism have been relatively few. Following the university bombings by the Students for a Democratic Society (or fringe elements of the group like the Weathermen) during the late 1960s and early 1970s, political violence within the borders of the United States was nearly unheard of until 1993.[12] Small attacks against foreign enclaves in the U.S., but not associated with the U.S. government, were occasionally the focus of acts of political violence, but even those events were rare. It was not until the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993 that true political violence again occurred against the U.S., its citizenry and government. Since that time two more direct acts of political violence have been aimed at the society in general, both in 1995. The April 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City and the October 1995 malicious destruction of the rail lines near Santa Fe, New Mexico both stand as recent terrorist acts against the citizens of the United States within the borders of the United States.

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[9] Bruce W. Warner. *Great Britain and the Response to International Terrorism* in D.A. Charters (ed.), *The Deadly Sin of Terrorism: Its Effect on Democracy in Six Countries.* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994).

[10] While Sinn Fein is a proscribed (technically illegal) faction, the British have kept channels of communication open with this group. They were strongly involved in the negotiation process which temporarily created a cease-fire in Northern Ireland in late 1995.

[11] Warner. 15.

These recent acts of political violence in the United States provide a new backdrop for investigation of the media in both the U.S. and in Great Britain. We are capable of comparing one nation with relatively recent acts of political violence to a nation with a modern history of political violence. Both nations share a common language and numerous cultural similarities, allowing media differences to be more readily revealed and eliminated through investigation of news coverage.

For this research the two instances of political violence were selected because of their individual impact on the nation where the act took place and because they could be easily labeled as political acts. The political violence issues are; the 1993 bombing of New York City's World

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[12] Some authors disagree as to the nature of political violence. In our definition, only acts which specifically seek political power are under consideration as political acts. By example, the actions of most rural militia are against the nature of government itself, not just a specific government policy and would be exempt from the study.

Trade Center, and the 1992 mortar shelling of #10 Downing Street in Great Britain aimed at assassinating Prime Minister John Major. These events provide the basis for a comparative study of the agenda-setting effects of political violence in the United States and Great Britain.

Methodology

This content analysis was undertaken through the use of computer-generated techniques. VBPro, developed by M. Mark Miller at the University of Tennessee, is combined with SPSS for statistical analysis of the potential affective attributes of proximity. News stories collected in archived databases are examined via four elite national newspapers, two in the U.S., and two in Great Britain. Full text archives of the stories were available through DIALOG. The database information was compared to the publication indices to ensure all stories were counted.

In order to set the affective attributes of proximity as a frame, two hypotheses are set forth:

H1: Terrorist acts will be reported in criminal terms where the act is proximal.

H2: Less proximal terrorist acts will be reported in more political terms.

Measurement

Four newspapers, two British and two U.S., were used for the examination. They are the *New York Times,* the *Washington Post,* the *Times of London, and The Guardian* (now in London, formerly the Manchester Guardian).

For this study full text accounts of the content of the four elite newspapers were analyzed. These were used to identify, examine, determine and track the type of discourse on terrorism by the newspapers.

The purpose is to determine whether proximity frames the issue of terrorism by characterizing the event in either criminal or political terms. A list of terms was developed to create the two categories and determine if the terrorist event was defined in either criminal or political terms by the selected media.

VBPro, a full-text document analysis computer program, was first used to provide the raw data for statistical analysis. Content analysis, by definition, is the quantification of meaning in documents. According to Babbie, "meaning may be either manifest (obvious) or latent (implied)." In manifest content, the words themselves define the manner in which the written material can be assessed. Latent content analysis is more difficult to categorize since it deals with underlying meanings attached to written material. For this study, manifest content is used for our measurement data. It also is assumed that manifest content would create the most direct correlation to affective attributes of framing.[13]

VBPro is capable of fully counting all words in use for a particular story or set of stories. Words are then listed in order of frequency in the news copy. These lists were used supplementally to supply the terms used in the analysis to differentiate between depictions of criminal/political actions. Coding assistants were asked to categorize the words in a pretest to the final statistical analysis.

For this study, the four newspapers were examined and their content categorized by the level of discourse which focused on either political or criminal talk. More than 8,000 pages of copy, extracted via DIALOG, were initially part of the content analysis. The newspaper copy was carefully screened and resulted in more than 4,000 pages for specific analysis.

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[13] Earl Babbie (1992). *The Practice of Social Research. 6th ed.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

The word list for coding was developed using results from a VBPro alphabetized count of 15 stories from each newspaper. All were selected at random. The alphabetized count was used to determine consistent/frequent use of certain words by the newspapers. there was no attempt to differentiate between the newspapers or the types of words. This was an aspect of screening out cultural terms.[14]

Words of a general nature and common to most sentences were eliminated from the search. Specifically eliminated were words which conveyed little or no "value" meaning , but were generally described as objects or pronouns like we, they, it, that, etc. Also eliminated were verbs which were forms of "to be," and other similar verb forms. After deleting words of little value for this study, the alphabetized sorting resulted in more than 2,000 words for initial examination. These words were then scrutinized for their potential content as either political and criminal affective attributes. Those words without potential content were eliminated because they contributed little to the structure of political or criminal "talk" by journalists. Other words which appeared, but infrequently, also were eliminated. From the total list, 77 words were selected for potential use in the study.

Five university professors, all former print or broadcast journalists, then coded the group of 77 words to determine whether those terms should be considered political, criminal, neither or both. The coders were advised that the nature of the study concerned political violence and that it was specifically about newspaper coverage of the issue of terrorism. No other information was given.

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[14] Kerlinger, Fred N. (1986). *Foundations of Behavioral Research, 3rd ed.*, Appendix C, pp. 637-644. Ft. Worth, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Terms which were considered neither or both by the majority of the coding group were eliminated automatically. Terms which were considered political by four of the five coders were included, as were terms which were considered criminal by four of the five coders. This created two sets of terms. The coded political search word set contained 26 words, while the criminal word set contained 13 words.

The coders were at a high level of disagreement on the nature of certain terms which could be used in a strictly criminal sense. For instance, the word "kill," and its other word forms, killers, killing, etc., were labeled as "both" by three of the coders. So, the terms were eliminated. Because this study is about similarities and differences, it was felt that there would be adequate copy studied to determine if the hypotheses were to be confirmed.

Two files, one for the 1993 World Trade Center coverage and another for the 1992 mortar attack on #10 Downing Street coverage were created. Each newspaper's coverage of the event was tagged as a case. VBPro was used as the initial analytical tool in the study to search for the terms from each list in each newspaper in the two files. VBPro can be formatted to examine files by the case, paragraph or sentence. In this instance, the cases were examined at the paragraph and sentence levels. VBPro specifically looks for terms per paragraph. Since it is probable that some paragraphs contain terms from both lists, it is likely that some paragraphs are counted in each group. This is not of consequence in this analysis because the questions sought to understand the differences and similarities in coverage between two nations by word selection. The paragraph results were consequently used for incorporation into SPSS for analysis. Correlations were derived from both the individual newspapers and through a cross-national examination of the terms.

DIALOG full-text citations were used as the source of story information for the content analysis. As a test of VBPro, the DIALOG stories each were tagged with a nonsense word and then counted through the search function of VBPro. A test of 30 selected stories produced an exact count of 30 as a VBPro result.

Results

Content Analysis: World Trade Center

VBPro recognized 385 stories and 7,911 paragraphs in the *New York Times* articles on the bombing of the World Trade Center. It also established that 1,709 paragraphs (21.6 percent) contained at least one of the selected political terms and 990 paragraphs (12.51 percent) contained criminal terms. Specifically, there were 2,622 hits from the list of political terms and 1,266 hits from the list of criminal terms. These numbers, in and of themselves, provide only a glimpse of the way in which the *New York Times* reported on the World Trade Center bombing. A comparison with other news reports is needed to draw any conclusions from the initial reports. The relationship will be examined after reporting on the findings from each of the other newspapers.

For the *Washington Post*, VBPro recognized 179 stories with a total count of 3,493 paragraphs. The program reported that 999 of those paragraphs (28.6 percent) contained at least one of the words from the political terms list. In addition, there were 611 paragraphs (17.49 percent) in which criminal terms were reported. Examining counts of the number of terms in each yielded results of 1,700 instances of the use of political words from the list and 815 criminal words used in those same stories.

VBPro reported that the *Times of London* ran 51 stories on the World Trade Center bombing. Those 51 stories contained 531 paragraphs. There were 227 paragraphs (42.75 percent) with political terms reported and 136 paragraphs (25.61 percent) reporting the use of criminal terms from the word list. An examination of the actual word count for political terms and criminal terms in the *Times of London* yielded 339 political words and 186 criminal words.

The Guardian results from the VBPro analysis yielded an even smaller number of stories reporting on the World Trade Center bombing, only 29. VBPro recognized 445 paragraphs in the count of those stories. Of those, 155 paragraphs (34.83 percent) contained political terms and 75 paragraphs (16.85 percent) contained the use of criminal words in the selected list.

Table one (1) shows the results of each of the four newspapers based on their results in the use of political words. Table two (2) is similar, but lists the results from the criminal word term search. In each table, the results have been organized so that we may begin to understand that there are differences in the reporting of the terms between the nations.

Political Terms
World Trade Center Bombing
Elite Newspaper Coverage: U.S. & Great Britain

Newspaper	*# of Stories*	*Mentions/ Total Paragraphs*	*# of Political Terms*
New York Times	*385*	*1709/7911 – 21.6%*	*2622*
Washington Post	*179*	*999/3493 – 28.6%*	*1700*
Times of London	*51*	*227/531 – 42.75%*	*339*
The Guardian	*29*	*155/445 – 34.83%*	*184*

Table 1

Criminal Terms
World Trade Center Bombing
Elite Newspaper Coverage: U.S. & Great Britain

Newspaper	*# of Stories*	*Mentions/ Total Paragraphs*	*# of Criminal Terms*
New York Times	*385*	*990/7911 – 12.51%*	*1246*
Washington Post	*179*	*611/3493 – 17.49%*	*815*
Times of London	*51*	*136/531 – 25.61%*	*186*
The Guardian	*29*	*75/445 – 16.85%*	*83*

Table 2

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The percentages in Table 1 on political term usage indicate that the British newspapers report higher levels of the use of political terms in their coverage of the World Trade Center bombing than the level of coverage of the newspapers in the United States. Without stronger statistical measurement, these results would indicate that there is a likelihood that the hypothesis regarding distance and political talk is confirmed.

However, the frequencies reported in Table 2 show that British newspapers also report a higher level of usage in words we have termed criminal in nature. This means that a stronger measurement is essential to ensure that we understand what is happening in the coverage of the World Trade Center bombing in both nations.

#10 Downing Street Attack

Following in the same format used for reporting the results of the VBPro search for the World Trade Center bombing, this study now examines the findings for the 1992 mortar attack on #10 Downing Street. The search of material in the #10 Downing Street mortar attack yielded a much smaller data base for the British coverage (see Table 3). The *New York Times* carried 24 stories on the mortar attack during the 13-month period examined.

Political Terms
#10 Downing Street Mortar Attack
Elite Newspaper Coverage: U.S. & Great Britain

Newspaper	*# of Stories*	*Mentions/ Total Paragraphs*	*# of Political Terms*
New York Times	*24*	*106/517 – 20.5%*	*156*
Washington Post	*27*	*111/512 – 21.68%*	*165*
Times of London	*77*	*229/965 – 23.73%*	*278*
The Guardian	*11*	*42/187 – 22.46%*	*48*

Table 3

The VBPro search revealed a total of 517 paragraphs in the *NY Times* stories with 106 (20.5 percent) of those paragraphs using political terms. There were only 26 paragraphs (5.03 percent) of the coverage which discussed the attack in criminal terms. Specifically, the *New York Times* carried 156 mentions of words from the political list with another 41 words identified from the crime word list.

Interestingly, the *Washington Post* carried more stories on the attack than the *New York Times*. The *Post* ran 27 stories, but those yielded only 512 paragraphs for analysis. Within those 512 paragraphs, 111 (21.68 percent) were identified as carrying political words from the terms list and 38 (7.42 percent) were reported as yielding words that fit the crime list. The total number of instances in which the *Washington Post* used words from the political list was 165, while word choices from the crime list were used only 41 times, the same as the *New York Times* copy.

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The *Times of London* ran 77 stories specifically discussing the mortar attack. This yielded 965 paragraphs for this analysis. Through the VBPro analysis, it was discovered that political words were used in 229 of those paragraphs, or 23.73 percent of the time. The use of criminal terms was lower, appearing in 88 paragraphs of the 965 analyzed paragraphs. This was 9.12 percent of the paragraphs studied. Overall, political words from the terms list were mentioned 278 times in the 77 stories, while the crime terms were mentioned 100 times.

The Guardian coverage of the mortar attack on #10 Downing Street was somewhat surprising even in raw terms. During the 13 months, stories discussing the mortar attack appeared only 11 times according to the DIALOG full text list. Still, the stories provided

Downing Street. Table 4 provides the similar material on the criminal words selected by the coders for the analysis. The total number of stories reported on the World Trade Center bombing was substantially higher than the total number of stories reported on the

mortar attack on #10 Downing Street. There were 644 stories in the World Trade Center analysis, but only 139 stories involved in the mortar attack. Still, the greatest number of stories came from the originating nation in each set of studies.

After compiling an overview of the data, each term was investigated by the event, the terms and the newspapers. These yielded some interesting, but not statistically significant results. Tables 5 and 6 show a compilation of the percentages of the coverage for political terms and crime terms for each event and the newspaper coverage it represents.

Tables 3 and 4 were used to construct tests via cross tabulation of the news coverage of events and the political or crime-related talk of the newspapers. These were categorized by the nation of origin. Essentially, the row variables were used as the independent variables and the column variables were used as the dependent variables to record the level of political or crime talk by publication.

Tables 7 and 8 show the general construction of the spreadsheet for use in the SPSS program. Originally, each newspaper was listed, and a crosstab was performed with a 4X2 construction. In order to further test the results, the program was collapsed to a 2X2 construction. Two crosstab spreadsheets were built, one for the World Trade Center and the second for the mortar attack on #10 Downing Street.

Several tests were performed, both in the crosstab and in non-parametric tests in order to provide a range of results and to assist in confirming one another. None of the findings

Criminal Terms
#10 Downing Street Mortar Attack
Elite Newspaper Coverage: U.S. & Great Britain

Newspaper	*# of Stories*	*Mentions/ Total Paragraphs*	*# of Criminal Terms*
New York Times	24	26/517 – 5.03%	41
Washington Post	27	38/512 – 7.42%	41
Times of London	77	88/965 – 9.12%	100
The Guardian	11	5/187 – 2.67%	5

Table 4

Political Terms--Percent of Mentions
World Trade Center & #10 Downing Street

Newspaper	*New York Times*	*Washington Post*	*Times of London*	*The Guardian*
World Trade Center	21.6	28.6	42.75	34.83
Mortar Attack	20.5	21.68	23.73	22.46

Table 5

Criminal Terms--Percent of Mentions
World Trade Center & #10 Downing Street

Newspaper	*New York Times*	*Washington Post*	*Times of London*	*The Guardian*
World Trade Center	12.51	17.49	25.61	16.85
Mortar Attack	5.03	7.42	9.12	2.67

Table 6

World Trade Center ***Converted for Crosstabs***			
	Political Talk %	***Crime Talk %***	***Total %***
New York Times	*1709 – 63.3%*	*990 – 36.7%*	*2,699 – 100%*
Washington Post	*999 – 62%*	*611 – 38%*	*1,610 – 100%*
Times of London	*625 – 62.5%*	*136 – 37.5%*	*363 – 100%*
The Guardian	*155 – 67%*	*75 – 33%*	*230 – 100%*

Table 7

#10 Downing Street ***Converted for Crosstabs***			
	Political Terms %	***Crime Terms %***	***Total %***
New York Times	*106 – 80%*	*26 – 20%*	*132 – 100%*
Washington Post	*111 – 75%*	*38 – 25%*	*149 – 100%*
Times of London	*229 – 72%*	*88 – 28%*	*317 – 100%*
The Guardian	*42 – 89%*	*5 – 11%*	*47 – 100%*

Table 8

were statistically significant. According to Pearson Chi-Square results (performed by hand), the test most frequently recommended for crosstab research by Wimmer and Dominick, the significance was at the .157 level (2-sided) in both tests. This level of significance obviously fails to meet the .05 level generally considered acceptable for believing that differences between groups was not by chance.[15]

Similar results were obtained using other non-parametric tests including Kolomogorov-Smirnov (.12 significance) and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks tests (.063). While the Wilcoxon test proved to nearly meet our test of significance, it is not considered an ideal test in crosstabs. Neither the 4X2 or 2X2 designs yielded significantly different results in the tests.

VBPro performed relatively well and provided an extensive array of information for analysis. Whether the word selection was sufficient however, remains to be seen. There is some likelihood that given a larger list, coders may have provided a greater range of responses on the crime-related word count. While this is not a fatal flaw, it does raise questions about whether endeavoring to divide the substance of responses into only two categories was appropriate.

There is a greater concern here from the set of words provided for analysis on the political terms. In the New York Times results, while 19 root words and their various word forms were included in the study, more than one third (964) responses came from "terrori*" and another 817 responses came from the word "sect." The political nature of these words is not generally in that the story is reported at all. Both terrorist events were reported extensively in their own countries, but there was a substantial drop-off in the reporting of the foreign event. The U.S. publications carried stories later in the year in which the discussion of the mortar attack was generally part of an overall discussion on the effectiveness of John Major as Prime Minister or as part of a larger discussion on the IRA or attempts to continue to censure the organization.

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[15] see Wimmer, R.D. and Dominick, J.R. (1997). *Mass Media Research (5th ed)*, p. 242. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

From the British perspective, after an initial period of staying with the factual activities on the stories about the World Trade Center, later stories often focused on radical Iranian factions and other Middle Eastern groups. These conventions are typically journalistic, using one story that is more current, but of only passing interest, to lead into another story that may have more interest and zest. This approach may have had an impact on the heavy occurrence of political terms.

It had been hoped that the news reporting emphasis on nearby acts would focus on the criminal nature of the events rather than the political. Some studies have indicated that terrorists tend to return to a more docile approach when the public and media are committed to defining an act of political violence in criminal terms.[16]

That was not the case according to this study. A number of researchers have reported that context also is an important action in the relationship between reporting and political violence. Context is a component of tone and should be labeled as a second level attritube in agenda setting research. It is apparent then that the political nature of the violence, at least in this study, has taken a strong place in the coverage. If these experts are correct, that could mean that more political violence should be expected, particularly in the United States.

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[16] Bassiouni, M.C. (Spring, 1982). Media Coverage of Terrorism: The Law and the Public," *Journal of Communication, 33.* and O'Sullivan, J. (1986). Media Coverage Causes Terrorism, in B. Neanyahu (ed), *Terrorism: How The West Can Win.* Washington D.C.: Jonathon Institute.

This study, in and of itself, raises more questions than it answers. Acts of terrorism need to be more fully investigated in how the news media report them. Is there a consistent approach to the political side of the language? In the World Trade Center case, the criminal act was performed by foreign nationals. But both Oklahoma City and the Unabomber case are purely American. Is there a likelihood that journalists in the United States will view terrorist acts by Americans differently than they view terrorist acts by people from other nations on our soil?

Are there better ways to gather and analyze stories for content analysis? From a purely practical standpoint, is there a way in which researchers can better manage the resources available to them in order to ensure that the results they are reporting are the most accurate?

The question was to examine the way elite newspapers in two individual nations handled the news coverage of those two distinct acts of political violence, particularly in respect to the proximity of the event. More study is clearly needed. Using proximity as a affective attribute in framing how news stories are approached, may be an accurate definition of its influence on news coverage, but it is still too early to make that claim specifically.

question, but their power might be. This means that while there is substantial evidence to say that most of the stories in both the United States and Great Britain had a stronger political voice than crime voice, those voices were dependent on just a few words. While most content analysis studies rely on only a few criteria to develop a theme, it should be noted that the criteria could be skewed. It is hoped that the VBPro analysis still provides us with a strong indicator for the style of speech in the news stories in both nations.

Conclusions

It should be remembered that the primary thrust of this investigation was to first compare the reporting of stories in political terms by four elite newspapers and then compare the reporting in criminal action terms by those newspapers. This establishes two areas for comparison between the four newspapers: How did they differ in their political talk of the event and how did they differ in their criminal action talk of the event?

Reviewing the actual results with the hypotheses brings about some interesting information. While neither hypotheses #1 and #2 for this study can be confirmed, the information does show that there is a strong inclination to push political talk when acts of terrorism are reported from a distance. This needs further examination.

At the same time, this exercise may be contributing to the overall development of mass media theory. While the emphasis of the news stories was on political words, there is a great deal of evidence to show that proximity may be a component in our search for generalizable framing attributes. Indeed, the effects may not present themselves so much in how a story is reported, but

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How Sexual Strategies Theory, Gender, and the Third-Person Effect, Explain Attitudes About Pornography

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How Sexual Strategies Theory, Gender, and the Third-Person Effect, Explain Attitudes About Pornography

ABSTRACT

The inter-relationship of the factors that influence attitudes in support of restrictions on pornography are explored using third-person effects theory and sexual strategies theory, which contrasts the sexual pairing behaviors of males and females. From survey data of Taiwan high school students a model was constructed depicting these relationships. All subjects perceived pornography to have greater negative influence on others than on themselves, but females perceived greater negative effects of it on themselves and others. Gender, perceived effects on self and perceived effects on others were also related to an attitude favoring control of pornography.

How Sexual Strategies Theory, Gender, and the Third-Person Effect, Explain Attitudes About Pornography

Calls for restriction on pornography are often politically expedient because popular sentiment links sexually explicit media with contemporary social problems such as rape, child abuse, and violence (Zillman & Bryant, 1989). Cultural and religious values have often viewed lascivious and prurient media as taboo. Some feminists have based their efforts to control pornography on an argument that characterizes pornography itself as sexual harassment and discrimination (Dworkin, 1985). In opposition to legal restrictions are strong commitments to freedom of expression and an as yet unproven cause and effect link between exposure to pornography and anti-social or criminal behavior (Jensen, 1995).

Social scientists have been intrigued by research that seeks to identify the demographics and life experiences associated with attitudes favoring control of media messages. Davison (1983) first identified the third-person effect that describes the perception that media exert greater persuasive influence on others than on self. This perception has been labeled the perceptual-bias component of the third-person effect (Perloff, 1993; Davison, 1996). However, when people believe that there is a harmful media effect, the logical follow-up question is, will they then wish to restrict that message that they believe to be harmful to others. More recent studies have focused on this behavioral component that predicts that third-person perceptions will lead to support for media restrictions: press coverage of criminal trials (Salwen & Driscoll, 1997), pornography (Gunther, 1995; Rojas, Shah, & Faber, 1996), violence on television (Rojas et al., 1996) and negative political advertising (Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). All of these topics have been on the public agenda because of proposed legislation to curtail or forbid these media depictions seen as harmful or negative.

Research support for the third person perceptual bias has been consistently robust (Perloff, 1993). However, it seems that the relationship of this perceptual bias to attitudes in support of media restriction depends on the perceived harm and its inter-action with other variables (Thompson, Chaffee & Oshagan, 1990). Gender is one of the variables that earlier studies of pornography have found associated with stronger pro-censorship attitudes. Social psychologists have found that women are more likely than men to associate pornographic materials with negative effects and also more likely to support restrictions on pornography . Therefore, in this study we propose to use sexual strategies theory to elaborate the relationship among gender, third-person effect and support for restriction of pornography. Although earlier studies have found that females are more likely than males to support restriction of pornography, few have attempted to provide a theoretical explanation (Malamuth, 1996; Theissen, 1994). This study uses sexual strategies theory to explain why females are more likely to support restrictions of pornography.

The purpose of this study is to construct a conceptual model that explains the theoretical links among gender, perceived effects on self and others, and attitudes supporting restriction of pornography. A review of literature on sexual strategies theory, gender differences and third-person effects will follow a description of the regulation of pornography in Taiwan, where the data were collected.

The Regulation of Pornography in Taiwan

When studying attitudes toward pornography in Taiwan, the centuries-old Chinese cultural context as well as the recent influences of western, including Japanese, print and video must be considered. Because of these cultural contrasts, comparison between what is labeled pornography in Taiwan and the West must be viewed with caution by researchers.

Chinese traditional literature has often featured erotic themes (He, 1996) and there are even centuries-old drawings of sexual acts (Brewer, 1982). But Confucian concepts of proper family life, filial piety and correct behavior of youth tended to sequester the sexually explicit and accept it as art, historical artifact and literature and not judge it by the same standards as contemporary materials.

Other realities are that technology, the new press freedom that followed the lifting of martial law in 1987, and international entertainment distribution systems have rendered the laws against pornography obsolete. In Taiwan and for use in this study, pornography includes sexually explicit material in books, adult magazines, comic books, and on computers or CD-ROM, as well as R-rated and X-rated films--in a theater, on cable television, and on rented video titles.

It should be noted further that the majority of pornographic materials available to adolescents in Taiwan are produced in the United States, Japan, Europe and Hong Kong, in that order. Local products in Chinese are limited (Wang, Wang, Shaw, & Wei, 1989). In Taiwan's exploding media mix, foreign products and images clash with traditional tendencies and behavior. How public policy is crafted to deal with these issues is an important question. Can cultural and social values be preserved while supporting democratic values and freedom of expression?

Review of the Literature and Hypotheses

The Third-Person Perception: The Perceptual Component

Since Davison (1983) proposed the third-person effect hypothesis, a number of studies have produced ample of evidence to support the third-person perception or the perceptual component of the hypothesis by using several different methodologies, including experiments and surveys. The perceptual component of the third-person effect hypothesis states that people tend to perceive mass media messages to have a greater impact on others than on themselves.

Perloff (1993) reported that 13 of 14 studies on the third-person effect between 1983 and 1992 found support for the perceptual component of the hypothesis. Recent research has found that the third-person effects are even stronger when the communication is seen as socially less valuable or damaging: rap music (McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997); pornography (Gunther, 1995; Rojas, et al., 1996); press coverage of the O. J. Simpson trial (Salwen & Driscoll, 1997). Research conducted in Taiwan (Hu & Wu, 1996) also indicated that qualified voters perceived election news and election polls to have greater influence on other people's voting decisions than their own. Based on these research findings, we predicted the following:

H1: Both male and female respondents will perceive pornography to have greater negative influence on others than on themselves.

Sexual Strategies Theory and Gender Differences

Sexual strategies theory, developed from sexual selection theory and evolutionary psychology, can be used to elaborate the relationship among gender, third-person effect and support for restriction of pornography. According to sexual strategies theory, human mating is "inherently strategic" and choices are made to solve specific adaptive problems (Buss & Schmitt, 1993, p. 205). In human evolutionary history, men and women have evolved a complex repertoire of short-term and long-term mating strategies. The successful pursuit of a strategy requires the solution of specific adaptive problems. A short-term strategy, for example, requires sexual motivation to mate with a large number of partners and the ability to identify sexually accessible partners. A long-term strategy, in contrast, involves "assessment of future trajectories of potential partners on dimensions central to reproductively relevant resources" (Buss, 1998, p. 24).

Although male and female are not expected to differ much in their long-term mating strategy (Malamuth, 1996), they differ considerably in their short-term mating strategies (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Buss, 1998). The male has a vast potential reproductive capacity, because his role in reproduction is to inseminate the female, and because he can play the role with great frequency without substantial sperm depletion (Posner, 1992). Therefore, the most effective reproductive strategy for a male is to mate with as many fertile females as possible, because he can not realize his full reproductive potential with a single sex partner (Buss, 1998).

The female's reproductive capacity is much more limited, a maximum of about twenty children in a lifetime (Posner, 1992; Malamuth, 1996). Because of the heavy burden of gestation, birth and lactation, a female who wants to maximize her reproductive success must carefully select a mate with ability and willingness to contribute parental investment (Buss, 1998). Mating with a large number of males in a short period of time could not increase her reproduction. Therefore, women are less interested in short-term mating opportunities and more interested in a potential mate's willingness to make a parental commitment and to invest relevant resources (Buss, 1998).

Empirical research has supported the basic assumptions of sexual strategies theory. For example, Buss and Schmitt (1993) found that men were more likely than women to desire a larger number of short-term mates, to express lower standards for short-term mates, and to consent to sex for a shorter length of time. Knodel and his associates (Knodel, Low, Saengtienchai & Lucas 1997) found that, in Thailand, women were viewed as having weaker and less urgent sexual desires than men. Thai men were widely seen as having a natural need for sex that required frequent outlet, and their extramarital sex activity was generally considered more acceptable by men and women. In a cross cultural study of sexual fantasy in Japan, Great Britain and the United States, Ellis and Symons (1990) found that men were more likely than women to dream about sexual events, to imagine sexual encounters with strangers, multiple partners, and anonymous partners--the kinds of situations often depicted in pornography.

Gender Differences, Third-person Effect and Restriction of Pornography

Thus, sexual strategies theory provides a persuasive explanation of gender differences related to sexual attitudes among humans across culture. It also provides a framework for predicting gender differences in the perceived effects of pornography on self and others and in attitudes toward pornography restrictions.

In this study, we develop a model to reflect the relationships among gender, perceived effects on self and others, and support for restriction of pornography. Figure 1 depicts an hypothesized model that attempts to predict support for restriction of pornography. The figure shows that gender will predict both perceived effects on self and others, which in turn will predict support for restriction of pornography.

Figure 1 about here

These proposed direct and indirect relationships may be described in a series of hypotheses. First, we proposed that gender would be related to perceived effects of pornography on self and others. We expected that gender differences in sexual strategies would be reflected not only in sexual behaviors, but also in attitudes toward pornographic media. In pornographic media, sexual activities tend to reflect elements related to men's short-term mating strategy. Men and women are depicted engaging in varied sexual behaviors without love or emotional involvement (Zillmann & Bryant, 1989), and many of those depicted have sexual relations with more than one person (Prince, Goldfarb, & Messaris, 1987). In the pornographic world, sexual activities tend to de-emphasize intimacy, love, affection and human connection (Jensen & Dines, 1998).

The values expressed in pornography largely coincide with men's short-term sexual strategy and clash with women's sexual strategy that emphasizes personal relationship, emotional involvement and long-term commitment. If women are less likely than men to pursue short-term mating opportunities, they should be less likely than men to be attracted to pornography and more likely to have greater negative responses. In fact, past research indicates that women are less likely than men to consume it frequently, to be less sexually aroused by it, and to have less favorable attitudes toward it (Malamuth, 1996; Greenberg, Brown & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993; Zillmann & Brown, 1989).

In a U.S. nationwide survey, Wilson and Abelson (1973), reported that 84% of men compared with 69% of women said they had been exposed to one or more kinds of pornographic material. They also found that women were more likely that men to associate pornography with negative effects. Effects that women foresaw ranged from "Make People Sex Crazy" and "Lead People to Lose Respect for Women," to "Lead to a Breakdown of Morals" and "Lead People to Commit Rape." Women also were less accepting of the arousal and entertainment values of these materials. Thiessen (1994) also noted that women express negative affect toward use of pornography and are less willing to volunteer for studies of erotica. Kendrick, Stringfield, Wagenhals, Dahl and Ransdell (1980) found that not only were females more likely to choose a soft-core film rather than a hard-core erotic film, but if given the additional choice, females were, compared with males, more likely to refuse participation.

Because pornographic scripts tend to instigate negative affect in many women, just as the absence of personal relationship and emotional involvement may not fit their sexual strategy, we expected women to be more likely than men to perceive greater effects of pornography on themselves and others. This expectation was also based on previous research in third-person effect, which found that females estimated greater negative effect of pornography on themselves and others (Gunther, 1995; Lee & Yang, 1996). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Female respondents will be more likely to perceive greater negative effects of pornography on themselves and others than male respondents.

Third, we proposed that females will be more likely to support restriction of pornography. This expectation is also based on sexual strategies theory and previous research findings. According to sexual strategies theory, women have evolved to be less interested in short-term mating, and more interested in attracting a mate who has the ability to acquire relevant resources and who is willing to commit to a long-term relationship (Buss, 1998). Pornographic materials that dwell on sexual activities without emotional involvement or love do not fit female sexual strategy. Viewing pornography was found to make women more tense, anxious, angry and hostile (Senn, 1993).

The widely discussed books, Dworkin's (1979) *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* and MacKinnon's (1993) *Only Words* have detailed incidents of pornography's harm and supported the feminist agenda against pornography. Research indicates that women not only view less erotic media, but also are more willing to seek restrictions on it (Kenrick, Stringfield, Wagenhals, Dahl & Ransdell, 1980). In their development of an Attitudinal Censorship Questionnaire, Hense and Wright (1992) found that although no gender differences where found on the General Censorship factor, females were more willing to censor pornography than were males. Lee and Yang (1996) found that females were more likely than males to support censorship of sexual violence and sexually explicit materials on television. Rojas, et al. (1996) found that women were more willing to censor pornography than were men. Thompson, et al. (1990) also found that women were somewhat more supportive than men of anti-pornography legislation.

Based on sexual strategies theory and previous research findings, we predicted that:

H3: Female respondents will be more likely to support restriction of pornography than male respondents.

Finally, we proposed that perceived effects of pornography on self and others would be positively associated with support for restriction of pornography. This prediction is based on Davison's third-person effects hypothesis and other previous studies. Most of the previous studies that examined the behavioral component of the third-person effect used magnitude of perceptual bias, or the magnitude of the difference in perceived effects on self and perceived effects on others, as a predictor of support for media restrictions (Gunther, 1995; McLeod et al., 1997; Salwen & Driscoll, 1997). However, Lo and Paddon (1998) question using the magnitude of perceptual bias as a relevant predictor of support for restriction of pornography because it does not distinguish between those who perceive pornography to have high influence on themselves and on others and those who perceive pornography to have low influence on themselves and on others. Instead, they proposed that both perceived effects on self and perceived effects on others be examined to identify more relevant predictors of censorship attitudes than the magnitude of perceptual bias.

Furthermore, other research suggests that the perceived effects on others motivate people to support media restrictions (Gunther, 1995; McLeod, et al., 1997). Salwen (1997) found that perceived effect on others was positively related to support for restrictions on unfair election news coverage. In addition, several previous studies also indicate a positive relationship between perceived effects of media messages on self and support for restriction of media. For example, Lee and Yang (1996) found that perceived effect on self was an important factor in predicting support for pornography restrictions. Gunther (1995) also found perceived effect on self was positively related to a pro-censorship attitude. In the light of these considerations, we predicted that:

H4: Both perceived negative effects of pornography on self and perceived negative effects on others will be positively associated with support for restriction of pornography.

Method

Subjects for this study were drawn from 15 randomly selected high schools in Taipei, Taiwan. Three classes were randomly chosen from each school. The sample, which comprises 45 classes, was designed to provide a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed in classes during a two-week period in December 1996. Of the total 1899 students, 1858 completed the questionnaires for analysis including 964 (51.9%) males and 894 (48.1%) females. Of the respondents, 642 (34.6%) were in Grade 10, 638 (34.5%) in Grade 11 and 574 (30.9%) in Grade 12. Questionnaires were distributed and instructions given by trained senior undergraduate students from National Chengchi University.

Measurement of Variables

Perceived Effects on Self and Others

To measure perceived effects on self, respondents were asked to rate separately the likely influence of pornography on their own moral values, attitudes toward the opposite sex, sexual knowledge, sexual attitudes and sexual behavior. The measurement of perceived effects on others consisted of the same five items reworded to refer to other high school students by replacing "my own" with "other high school students'." Respondents were instructed to estimate influences on the following 5-point scale: (5) a large negative influence; (4) a small negative influence; (3) no influence at all; (2) a small positive influence; (1) a large positive influence.

Principal component analysis was performed to determine whether the self and others items would measure two different underlying dimensions. The results showed that the self and other items were clearly grouped in two factors and measured two underlying dimensions (see Table 1). The two-factor solution explained 70.3% of the total variance. The five "self" items were added and divided by five to create an index of "perceived effects on self" (Cronbach's alpha= .87, mean=2.97). The five "others" items were also added and divided by five to constitute an index of "perceived effects on others" (Cronbach's alpha= .91, mean=3.46). The higher the score, the greater the perceived negative effects on self and others.

Table 1 about here

Support for Restrictions on Pornography

Support for restrictions on pornography was measured with a four-item index. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement (5=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree) with government legislation to ban R-rated pornographic films or programs, X-rated pornographic films or programs, pornographic publications and pornography on computer or CD-ROM.

Principal component analysis showed that the four items were grouped in a single factor and measured the same underlying concept. The one factor solution explained 78% of the total variance. A measure of support for restrictions on pornography was created by adding the four items and dividing the sum by four (Cronbach's alpha= .91, mean=3.15).

Table 2 about here

Results

Paired t-tests

A series of paired t-tests was conducted to test the first hypothesis that predicted that both male and female respondents would perceive pornography to have greater negative influence on others than on themselves. As expected, a majority of male (57.8%) and female (64.6%) respondents perceived others to be more negatively influenced by pornography than themselves. Only 11.4% of males and 9.9% of females perceived more negative influence on themselves and 30.8% of males and 25.5% females perceived no difference in influence.

The results of paired t-tests supported the existence of third-person effects for both male and female respondents. As shown in Table 3, both males and females perceived pornography to have greater negative influence on others than on themselves in both the individual items and the combined effect index. H1 was supported

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Table 3 about here

Path Analysis

A path analysis was conducted to test the model proposed in Figure 1. The analysis consists of four regression analyses. In the first two regression analyses, the two indices of perceived effects on self and perceived effects on others were regressed on gender. These analyses examined H2, which predicted that females were more likely than males to perceived greater negative effects of pornography on themselves and others. The analyses indicated that gender was a significant predictor of both perceived effects on self and perceived effects on others. H2 was supported.

The third regression analysis regressed the variable of support for restriction of pornography on gender. This analysis examined H3 which predicted female respondents will be more likely to support for restriction of pornography than male respondents. As shown in Figure 1, gender was significantly associated with support for restriction of pornography, indicating females were more likely to support restriction of pornography. This analysis supported H3.

While controlling for the influence of gender, the fourth regression analysis regressed the variable of support for restriction of pornography on perceived effects on self and perceived effects on others. This analysis examined H4 which predicted that perceived negative effects of pornography on self and perceived negative effects on others would be positively associated with support for restriction of pornography.

As shown in Figure 1, perceived negative effects on self and perceived negative effects on others were significant predictors of support for restriction of pornography. The results of the analyses revealed that H4 was also supported.

Table 4 about here

Discussion

The results of this study show that most male and female respondents perceive pornography to have a greater negative influence on others than on themselves. Such a finding is consistent with Davison's third-person effect hypothesis. The results of the study also support the proposed model in Figure 1. They suggest a causal relationship exists among gender, perceived effects on self and others and support for restriction of pornography. As expected, gender is related to perceived effects on self and others, which in turn, are related to support for restriction of pornography.

Perhaps the most important contribution of this study is to show that sexual strategies theory can help elaborate the relationship among gender, third-person effect and support for restriction of pornography. This study provides evidence of substantial gender differences in perceived effects and attitudes supporting restriction of pornography. As expected, women are more likely than men to perceive greater negative effects of pornography on themselves and others and to be more willing to support restriction of pornography. These finding are consistent with sexual strategies theory and previous research on pornography.

Some communication scholars have attributed gender differences in perceived effects of pornography to cultural influence (Lee & Yang, 1996). Although we do not deny that cultural influence may affect people's perception and attitudes toward pornography, we believe that the evolved sexual psychological mechanisms provide a more persuasive explanation than culture for gender differences in perceived effects of pornography. Future research may replicate this study in different countries and with adolescent as well as adult samples to see if this model is applicable to other cultures or populations.

The present study also makes a contribution to the literature on third-person effects by demonstrating that both perceived effects on self and perceived effects on others are positively related to support for restrictions on pornography. The results provide evidence for a linkage between the perceptual and behavioral components of the third-person effects. This linkage, however, is somewhat different from what previous research has suggested. Much of the research on third-person perceptual and behavioral effects has computed the magnitude of the difference between perceived effects on self and perceived effects on others, or the magnitude of perceptual bias, as a predictor of support for media restriction. As the results of this study demonstrate, both perceived effects on self and perceived effects on others are positively related to support for restriction of pornography. It seems that it should be the additive rather than subtractive effects of the two negative perceptions of pornography that best predict support for restriction of pornography. Clearly, the theoretical relationship among perceived effects on self, perceived effects on others, gender and support for media restriction merits further research.

For government authorities, which set communication policy, this study has important implications. Because the perception of more harmful effects on others is significantly related to support for censorship, part of that support is based on an erroneous assumption. Opinion polls are likely to report inflated negative attitudes about the effects of pornography and stronger support for governmental restrictions.

In addition, it is facile to aver that the perceived negative effect of pornography on self does not have to be a public policy concern, because those who feel reading or viewing it is harmful can simply avoid purchasing it or can avert their eyes. Industry has cooperated, in some cases reluctantly, with this solution by agreeing to warning labels and rating systems. However, research subjects who respond that pornography has a negative effect on self may be expressing a sense of physical or relational vulnerability when pornography is consumed by others rather than a sense that their own internal mental or emotional well-being is at risk. Any third-person effect study that looks only at the perceptual difference between first and third person effects and ignores the perceived effect on self will miss an important variable. The specific effects perceived by those who assert there are effects from pornography need further exploration.

Finally, it should be noted that in spite of the label, "behavioral effect," this study has not measured behavior. What we really measured is attitude. Future researchers should extend this research to measure behavior--the action initiated by persons who seek to change legislation and public policy to control the media available to others.

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Table 1 : Principal Component Factor Analysis of Self and Others Items
(Varimax Rotation)

Item	Factor Loading	
	Factor 1	factor 2
Sexual attitudes-others	.88	.21
Sexual knowledge-others	.84	.20
Sexual behavior-others	.83	.21
Attitudes toward the opposite sex-others	.82	.25
Moral values-others	.80	.22
Sexual attitudes-self	.22	.85
Sexual knowledge--self	.21	.84
Sexual behavior--self	.21	.80
Attitudes toward the opposite sex--self	.22	.72
Moral values- self	.17	.71
Eigenvalues	5.25	1.78
Variance explained	52.5%	17.8%
Total percent of variance	70.3%	
Cronbach's alpha	.91	.87

Table 3: Mean Estimates of Influence on Pornography on Self and Others

Item	N	Self	Others	Difference	t-value
Total Respondents					
Perceived Influence on					
Moral values	1854	3.29 (.85)	3.71 (.94)	.42	20.26***
Attitudes toward the opposite sex	1850	3.10 (.93)	3.57(1.07)	.47	20.53***
Sexual knowledge	1854	2.70(1.05)	3.19(1.23)	.49	20.40***
Sexual attitudes	1855	2.81(1.06)	3.38(1.21)	.57	22.69***
Sexual behavior	1848	2.92(1.09)	3.45(1.19)	.53	21.62***
Combined influence	1842	2.97 (.82)	3.46 (.96)	.49	27.07***
Male Respondents					
Perceived Influence on					
Moral values	964	3.25 (.82)	3.59 (.94)	.34	12.06***
Attitudes toward the opposite sex	962	2.99 (.94)	3.46(1.09)	.47	14.66***
Sexual knowledge	964	2.55(1.02)	3.02(1.21)	.47	13.85***
Sexual attitudes	964	2.67(1.04)	3.18(1.22)	.51	14.54***
Sexual behavior	962	2.70(1.09)	3.19(1.20)	.49	14.44***
Combined influence	960	2.83 (.79)	3.29 (.96)	.46	17.92***
Female Respondents					
Perceived Influence on					
Moral values	890	3.34 (.89)	3.84 (.92)	.50	16.84***
Attitudes toward the opposite sex	888	3.21 (.91)	3.69(1.04)	.48	14.37***
Sexual knowledge	890	2.86(1.05)	3.38(1.23)	.52	15.06***
Sexual attitudes	891	2.97(1.07)	3.59(1.17)	.62	17.77***
Sexual behavior	886	3.16(1.04)	3.72(1.11)	.56	16.22***
Combined influence	882	3.11 (.82)	3.65 (.92)	.54	20.49***

Note: Figures in parentheses are standard deviation

*** P<.001

Table 2: Principal Component Analysis of Support for Pornography Restriction Items

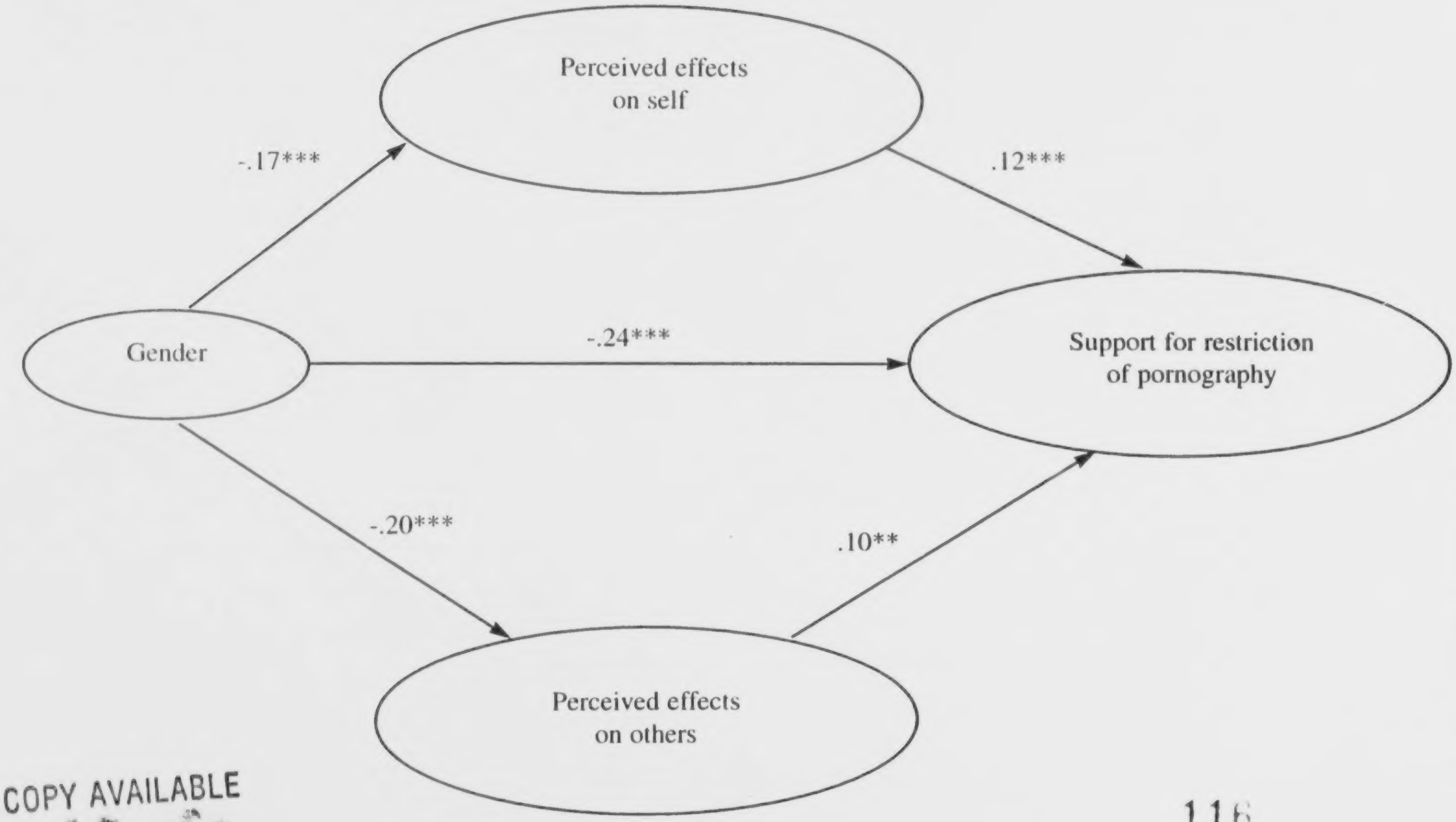
Item	Factor Loading
Pornographic publications	.92
Pornography on computer or CD-ROM	.92
X-rated films or programs	.85
R-rated films or programs	.84
Eigenvalue	3.12
Variance explained	78%
Cronbachs alpha	.91

Table 4: Zero-order Correlations between Gender, Perceived Effects on Self and Others, and Support for Restriction of Pornography

Variables	1	2	3
1. Gender			
2. Perceived effects on self	-.17*		
3. Perceived effects on others	-.20*	.66*	
4. Support for restriction of pornography	-.24*	.22*	.22*

Note: Gender coded (1-male, 0=female; * p < .001)
N=1837

Figure 1: Proposed Path Analysis Model of Third-Person Effects And Results of the Analysis: Standardized Betas


Perceived effects on self
-.17***
.12***
Gender
-.24***
Support for restriction of pornography
-.20***
.10**
Perceived effects on others

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Note: Gender coded (1=male, 0=female): **p<.01; ***p<.001

CT+M

Challenging the 'Mobilization Model' of Agenda Setting

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ABSTRACT

Agenda-setting researchers often assume an underlying "mobilization model" of mass communication in which citizens supply story ideas to media outlets. The resulting stories serve as catalysts for change in politics and society. However, in the last decade some studies have questioned that model.

By revealing who influences or controls the agenda presented to the readers of three small daily newspapers in Northwest Ohio regarding local school coverage, this paper examines that model.

Content analysis reveals that the reporters rely heavily on the superintendent of schools in all three small cities for their information, and ethnographic techniques illustrate how three different systems with different dynamics yield similar results in each newspaper. In each case, the superintendents or other officials controlled the agenda presented to the readers. The officials did so through their own active information dissemination practices. The acquiescent news-gathering routines of the journalists encouraged and fostered this control.

The paper then proposes a "support model" of mass communication depicting the information flow moving in the opposite direction from that of the mobilization model. The project also discusses the implications of the support model and its possible detrimental effects on the democratic process.

INTRODUCTION

For the last 25 years at least, agenda-setting has been among the most well accepted tenets of mass communication theory.

Most researchers in this area focus on the how the agenda presented in one or more media outlets affects the audience. Mostly, as Cohen said, media outlets "may not be successful telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling people what to think about."[1] A broad array of studies support his maxim.

While agenda-setting theory and its relationship to the audience continues to intrigue researchers, far fewer look at who sets the agenda of the agenda setters.

Nevertheless, aseveral studies on "gatekeeping" and press-source relationship have provided enough information in enough settings to provide the basis for at least one new agenda-setting theory, one that challenges a commonly-held assumption among most agenda setting researchers.

When researchers look at who sets the agenda presented in the media, it is more often than not set by "official" sources: government officials, business or social elites or a combination thereof. Such a notion challenges the "mobilization model" of agenda setting, which assumes that the media influences the agenda for the audience, which then pressures public officials to implement that agenda. This model holds "that the general public, outraged by the disclosures [presented by media outlets] about ... [various issues] ... responds by demanding reforms."[2]. Under [illegible] model, public pressure becomes the catalyst for the formulation and enactment of new policies.

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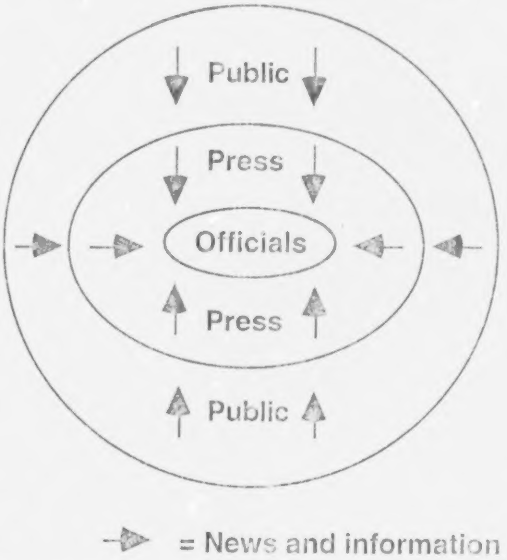
[1] Bernard C. Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy, (Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press 1963) 16.

2 David L. Protess, Fay Lomax Cook, Jack C. Doppelt, James S. Ettema, Margaret T. Gordon, Donna Leff, and Peter Miller, The Journalism of Outrage: Investigative Reporting and Agenda Building in America, (New York, Guildford Press, 1993) 244.

Fig. 1.1 The Mobilization Model



Under the mobilization model of agenda setting, members of the public present story ideas, concerns and issues to media outlets, which then publicize them as routine stories or investigations. These stories pressure the policy makers to take action.

During the last decade, as research began to ask who sets the agenda of the agenda setters, the results began to challenge the mobilization model. The mobilization model does not stand up to close scrutiny.

In a decade-long study at Northwestern University of the interaction of the press, policy makers, and the audience in Chicago in the 1980s, Protess, Cook, Doppelt, Ettema, Gordon, Leff, and Miller found that public officials could set the agenda of the agenda-setters. In a series of case studies on investigative reports, the researchers found that the policy makers came up with story ideas and presented them to the media, which in turn presented them to the audience. In all cases, the policy-making sources already had answers to the issues raised by the investigative reports before the stories were printed or broadcast. The public officials were the sources of the stories, not the concerned public of the mobilization model. Under the mobilization model, the audience members would present agenda items to the public officials. The agenda presented in the media, then, reflected the agenda-setting influence of the public officials rather than the members of the public. The media outlets, in these studies, were more public relations tools for the policy makers than catalysts for response to the public's needs. The stories delivered pre-fabricated policies and answers to problems on the public agenda. The public could not use the press to force the policy makers into action.

Paletz, Reichert and McIntyre said in a qualitative study that the rituals followed by the press to cover the city council in Durham, N. C., (a routine setting similar to other such settings throughout the country) illustrate that the newspaper "is essentially supportive of local government."[3]

In the Northwestern studies, since the investigative reports and the solutions to the problems exposed actually came from the government officials in the first place, the investigations turned out to be essentially supportive of local government as well.

Kanervo and Kanervo, in a 1989 study of public administrators, found that officials in many small towns tend to perceive the local newspaper as a tool to influence the public agenda, and that those officials actively try to influence newspaper content.

Sigal in 1973 and Brown, Bybee, Wearden, and Straughan in 1986 found national newspapers and wire services to be heavily dependent on official sources. Brown et al. believed that dependence may filter out alternative viewpoints. Shoemaker and Reese made similar assertions about the marginalization of minority viewpoints in 1991. Atwater and Fico in 1988 found a heavy dependence on official sources in both radio and television coverage of the Michigan state house. Keefer, in a 1993 study of congressional issues, concluded that the media's practices "serve to hinder, rather than facilitate, citizen participation" in the policy-making process.[4]

Taken together, these various studies demonstrate a tendency of journalists to rely on official sources, which may in effect leave members of the public out of the debate in various media outlets and perhaps, as Keefer suggests, out of the policy-making process.

Even studies that appear to support the mobilization model may just as easily challenge it upon closer inspection. In 1996, Brewer and McCombs examined the increased coverage of children's issues (education, health, daycare, etc.) in the *San Antonio Light* and compared the coverage to subsequent municipal spending on these issues. The researchers found a 61 percent increase in spending and a 55 percent increase in parks and recreation following the heavy news coverage.[5]

That might seem to indicate to a casual observer that the newspaper coverage led to more citizen awareness, and that led to action. It could be just as easily the result of a cooperative effort between policy makers and journalists to build support for initiatives the politicians already wished to pursue, and the coverage was simply used as a justification for efforts already underway. In fact, Brewer and McCombs mention that the local governments already had initiatives in place when the newspaper began focusing on the problem. Rather than bringing the issues to the attention of the officials, the newspaper coverage was used to inform the public about programs already in place. Brewer and McCombs' study showed how effective these efforts were, rather than illustrating the relationship between sources and journalists.

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[3] David L. Paletz, Peggy Reichert, and Barbara McIntyre, "How the Media Support Local Government Authority," Public Opinion Quarterly 35 (1972): 90.

4 Joseph D. Keefer, "The News Media's Failure to Facilitate Citizen Participation in the Congressional Policymaking Process," Journalism Quarterly 70, 1993: 413.

5 Marcus Brewer and Maxwell McCombs, "Setting the Community Agenda," Journalism and Mass Communcation Quarterly, 73, 1, (1996): 13.

This is not the only recent agenda-setting study that challenges the mobilization model. In a case study in Alabama, Walsh-Childers in 1996 studied how the *Alabama Journal's* coverage of infant mortality brought increased attention from local officials to the issue. The special edition of the newspaper was used as a tool by legislators, health organizations and others to focus attention on the issue in order to get increased funding. Walsh-Childers did not report how much additional funding the agencies received, if any. While she says the newspaper helped put the issue of infant mortality on the legislative agenda, she admits the idea came from the officials themselves. "Producing a major series on an important issue was an annual project for the journal. ...Meetings with some key public health officials confirmed that infant mortality was one of the state's [illegible] health problems, but perhaps also one of its most solvable."[6]

Therefore, even if newspaper coverage and subsequent public opinion helped pressure some officials to spend money on the infant mortality issue, other officials were involved in setting the agenda of the paper at the beginning of the process. The public was not part of the process.

These studies represent part of a trend of agenda-setting research that continues today, an examination of who sets the agenda of the agenda setters. In a 1993 review of agenda-setting research, (representing a 20-year retrospective on the field), McCombs said that the new wave of studies has "a demonstrable impact on the public agenda," and they are "the foundation of a new media criticism, criticism solidly grounded in a theory of mass communication." [7]

The findings of these studies challenge ingrained assumptions among journalism professionals. The American Society of Newspaper Editors states the press should "bring an *independent* (emphasis added) scrutiny to bear on the forces of power in society, including the conduct of officials at all levels of government."[8] If the sources from which journalists get their information are most often the sources of power, they are hardly independent. Journalists may be more the

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[6] Kim Walsh-Childers, "A Death in the Family"–A Case Study of Newspaper Influence on Health Development Policy," Journalism Quarterly, 71, 4 (1996): 823.

[7] Maxwell McCombs, "Explorers and Surveyers: Expanding Strategies for Agenda-Setting Research," Journalism Quarterly 69, (1993): 813.

[8] Protess, Reichert, and McIntyre, 14.

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spokespersons for their sources rather than acting as independent agents focusing on the problems of government and offering solutions.

If the press does not even try to meet the ASNE ideals, democracy in the united States may be threatened. The exclusion of a broad segment of the public from policy making or a failure to gauge public opinion may lead officials to ignore some viable options, to lack perspective on the options they do consider, or to lose the opportunity to consider options never presented to them.

The problem strikes at the basis of democratic political theory. "True democracy can only exist when the widest possible participation is afforded in all institutions that affect society at large," said political theorist Robert G.Picard in 1985. "The concept of participation is basic to the concepts of democracy and democratic rule. It denotes the sharing of decision making among all those involved in or affected by the area in which decisions are made."[9]

The following paper combines Paletz, Reichert, and McIntyre's assertions about the supportive nature of press routines with the more recent studies about the roles and perceptions of the policy makers. While journalists may tout the need for independence, news-gathering practices may make them dependent upon their "official" policy making sources, in effect keeping alternative sources and voices, and perhaps alternative solutions, out of the process.

This project specifically asks the research question of who sets the agenda of three media outlets (local newspapers) in a routine setting and how the agenda-setting process works. The answers are provided by answering further research questions of who generates the stories: journalists, official sources, audience members or others, who is excluded, if anyone is, and whether the practices and rituals of the local newspaper include or invite public participation in the policy-making process or foster the positive image of the status quo as suggested by Paletz, Reichert, and McIntyre. The study also asks whether or not the mobilization model is in effect or if other models may apply.

The project is a combination of two methodologies: content analyses to illustrate the nature of the sources in local newspapers, thereby demonstrating the nature and extent of the reliance of official sources as portrayed in the newspaper, and a qualitative study using ethnographic techniques to describe in detail why the news-gathering and dissemination system works as it does. The quantitative study shows what the newspaper conveys to audience members and the qualitative approach answers the questions of why the events and information are portrayed as they are.

As the result of the researcher attending school board meetings and other forums in which policy is discussed and presented to the public, the project describes some of the agenda-setting

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[9] Robert G. Picard, The Press and the Decline of Democracy, (Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1985) 10.

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dynamics in action, as did Paletz, Reichert, and McIntyre. By observing the reporters' rituals as they cover news events live and interviewing them afterward, the researcher addresses the issue of the nature of opposition and alternative voices and how the newspaper treats them. The project also examines the mobilization model in a routine setting rather than in an investigative one. By identifying and quantifying the sources of school system stories, the project provides information on whether school officials take their cues from public pressure, as the mobilization model suggests, or whether they present policy through the media to the public, as suggested by Kanervo and Kanervo.

The findings of this study may also provide inferences concerning the relationships between the media and their sources in other contexts as well, inside government on the local, state and federal levels, and also within business and other non-governmental areas in which journalists interact with "official" sources.

Altogether, the public's exclusion from the policy-making process and the media's complicity through their routines undermines the effectiveness of the democratic process. The media's acquiescence and the government officials' active agenda setting, the Northwestern team said, puts officials in a role that very well may be threatening, rather than helping, American democracy. "This role, which teams the journalist and the public official as Fact Finder, Presenter of 'Reality,' and Creator of Policy Result, may be seen by some as inimical to the democratic process."[10]

The role the Northwestern researchers describe is one of the dangers facing modern democracy, Sartori said. "Before they (members of the public) want something, they are often made to want it,"[11] he said, echoing the observations of the Northwestern team. "The people are told that the people themselves govern, (therefore) let us make sure what is on display is not a sheer facade democracy, a pure and simple sham democracy."[12]

To ensure against a "sham democracy," government officials need to include public opinion and participation in the decision-making process. The mobilization model may facilitate democracy by transmitting the needs of the people to the officials. However, media may also be used as a tool for control, whether officials realize it or not.

Heavy reliance on official sources may undermine the media's role in conveying ideas to government officials. Audiences who receive a picture of officials who make decisions without their participation may be discouraged from becoming part of the process.

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[10] Cook, Tyler, Goetz, Gordon, Protess, Leff, and Molotch, 33.
[11] Sartori, 123
[12] Sartori, 123.

According to much of the current research, that danger is being realized. The Northwestern studies demonstrated a tendency for officials to use investigative reports as a tool to win support for decisions that have already been made without citizen participation. The rituals of the media and journalists' heavy use of official sources may facilitate that tendency and help officials control audiences rather than foster democracy.

This examination into the role of the local newspaper in small cities ties several research trends together and thus sheds light on a larger danger: whether or not the news media foster or hinder democracy in America.

METHODOLOGY

This triple case study project employs two methods, quantitative content analysis and a qualitative analysis using ethnographic techniques, in order to explicate the research question of who is setting the local newspapers' agendas in a routine setting. The two work together to explain the overall process. Broadly, the content analysis identifies what is being portrayed and the qualitative analysis explains why it is portrayed as it is. For example, the content analysis identifies with whom stories originate: reporters, officials, meetings, or audience members; and the qualitative techniques explain whether that source was an active agenda setter or a passive supplier of information responding to journalistic stimulus. Together, they explain the agenda-setting process in a routine setting.

The dual methods may help overcome a problem identified by Tuchman (1977), who said that content analysis provides no context by which to consider the information analyzed.

> If one wishes to comment on kinds of data that are either omitted or underrepresented, one must have some standard against which to compare the material, such as earlier content analysis or some independent facts about the present.[13]

One of the best ways to formulate such a standard, something to give context to the content analysis, is by observing firsthand the events being covered and comparing them to how they are portrayed or if they are omitted. Thus, the use of two methodologies employs "the wisdom of using additional methods to validate the statements based on content analysis."[14]

While the study describes and analyzes relationships between individuals, the primary focus is the overall agenda-setting *process* that results in the agenda presented to the public in a media outlet.

The research focuses on three comparable Northwest Ohio cities, their school boards, and their daily newspapers. The three cities were chosen because of the relative simplicity of the newspaper-school board relationship. Situations in which there are competing media or complicated and competing political structures with many informants on all levels would be too unwieldy to analyze. By focusing on a simple, routine relationship, this study looks at whether similar findings may arise from investigating day-to-day reporting.

The newspapers each had small staffs and lacked direct competing media. Each newspaper was the major news organ for the school system, according to local officials who were contacted prior to the study. Each newspaper claimed to be the primary source of local news for its region. Each newspaper is located in the county seat and each city is the largest municipality in its county, surrounded by rural agricultural areas.

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[13] Gaye Tuchman, "The Exception Proves the Rule: The Study of Routine Press Practices," Strategies for Communication Research, eds., Paul Hirsch, Peter V. Miller, and F. Gerald Kline, (Beverly Hills Ca., Sage Publications, 1977) 59.

[14] Tuchman, 60.

While the circulation size varied for the three newspapers, the format of the coverage was essentially similar regarding schools. Each newspaper focused primarily on local news, though state and national news also appeared, each had one reporter primarily involved in education coverage, and each had a separate "education page" devoted to school stories. It is important to compare similar styles of staffing because a larger regional newspaper may have one or two education reporters responsible for covering several school districts. The structure and nature of that coverage would certainly affect the nature of the agenda presented on educational issues rather than the relationships between the journalists and officials.

A small newspaper and its hometown provides a community with clear boundaries since newspaper circulation generally coincides with the functional boundaries of a given municipal or county area, according to Stamm.[15] Education coverage is a typical routine situation. On most small newspapers, the school system is a clearly defined regular "beat." Since the school system is a regular beat, this study provides the basis to make inferences that could be applied to school board coverage in other towns as well as about other "routine" coverage, such as the city council or the zoning board.

The period of study was from March 15 to May 15, 1993, during which there were at least two regular school board meetings in each city. A two-month study period during a time of the year during which there were no major holidays was long enough to observe the participants deal with several issues and stories but short enough for issues to be fresh in the minds of the participants when asked about them later. Since the time frame did not include holiday events, budget formation, preparing for a new term or other seasonal issues, there was a greater possibility that issues that did arise would be more dependent on individuals and relationships than on seasonal variables like holidays or other routine tasks.

Participants in the process were interviewed in person following about a month of quiet observation.

The content analysis provides a structure to illustrate the agenda presented to the audience as well as illustrate who controls that agenda and how those agents are portrayed. The content analysis also illustrates the inferences of previous research by providing real data to back up observations concerning the agenda setting process.

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[15] Keith R. Stamm, Newspaper Use and Community Ties: Toward a Dynamic Theory, Norwood, (N.J., Ablex Publishing, 1985) 58-64.

Also, by comparing the content analysis to the actual experience of sitting through the meeting or other public or private news-making events, the researcher identified alternative voices in the process that might not reach the public through the press.

Administrators, school board members, and teachers were considered official sources, and students, parents, and taxpayers not connected with the school system were regarded as unofficial sources. If a teacher made it clear he or she was speaking as an individual rather than a school official, he or she would have been regarded as an unofficial source.

To ensure against arbitrary categorization and oversights in coding, the content analysis was done three times: twice by the researcher, three months apart, and once by a graduate student at Arkansas State University. Inter-coder reliability was ensured each time by comparisons of the content analysis with the previous analysis. Questions in coding were discussed every time they came up, but ultimately it was the coder's choice as to how to code a story. No inconsistencies occurred.

Stories were coded in the aggregate, including all three case studies, as well as coded separately by city in order to make comparisons between newspapers.

Content analysis

In the aggregate of all three cities, the newspapers published 71 stories concerning the school systems during the study period: 19 in City One, 39 in City Two, and 14 in City Three. All school stories, including promotional stories, were included in the analysis but blurbs and announcements of three paragraphs or less were not. All issue-related stories exceeded six inches during the study period. Even advance announcements concerning meetings ran at least six inches.

Each paper ran an "education page" at least once a week, always consisting of news of activities and events, rather than policy. All issue-related or policy-related stories were relegated to the news pages in each publication. The City Two newspaper ran a daily education page, while the others ran theirs weekly, accounting for the much larger number of City Two stories. Also, the public relations director of City Two and his staff of interns from City Two State University generated an average of about six stories a week and sent them to the newspaper.[16] Of these, the newspaper published an average of 4.2 stories of six inches or longer a week.

Given the nature of previous research, it was not surprising to find heavy reliance on officials for story ideas and copy in all three cities. The extent of that reliance was overwhelming. The officials, generally the superintendents, were by far the dominant source of story ideas. Taken in combination with the total absence of stories generated by parents, teachers, students, or members of the public, the reliance on the official sources gave the officials ample opportunity to control the agenda presented to the public.

[illegible] aggregate, officials generated 44 stories, 61.9 percent, either through press releases or phone calls; 24 stories, 33.8 percent, either previewed, covered, or followed up on school board meetings. Reporters themselves generated only three stories, 4.3 percent. Of these "enterprise" stories, one was in the City One newspaper, a flattering profile of the new City Three superintendent of schools, and two in City Three explained the school levy. Of the City Three school levy stories, no sources opposing the levy were quoted, only supporters. There were no independently generated stories in City Two.

There were no stories generated by members of the public in any city during the study period

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[16] The City Two public relations manager's definition of a story included short promotional announcements that were not included in the content analysis.

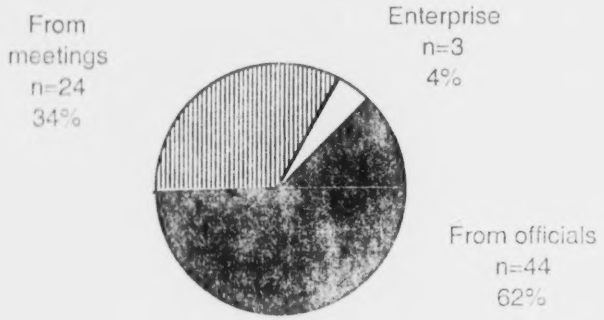

Fig. 3.1. Story Sources (Aggregate of three newspapers, n=71)

No stories in any newspaper were generated by school board members. All 44 stories generated by officials came from the superintendent or the City Two public relations manager. Even stories on programs and events that quoted school principals, teachers, or other school employees were generated through press releases or phone calls that came from the superintendent or PR manager's office.

The primary source of information or the person first and/or most often mentioned[17] in 51 of the stories was an official. There were only two stories in which non-official persons were mentioned most prominently: a story of the reaction of students to cutbacks in rural school bus service in City One and a story covering a hearing concerning budget cuts in City Three following the defeat of the school levy. Even in stories that mentioned students and parents in City Two, students nor parents were neither the first nor the most commonly quoted sources. In 18 stories, 25.35 percent, no source was mentioned at all. Fourteen of these, 35.9 percent of the paper's total, were in the City Two newspaper, and all of these were promotional stories of upcoming programs or events and were provided by the public relations department. The one sourceless story in City Three promoted the spring concert and was supplied as a press release from the high school principal.

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[17] In each case in this study, the first person was also the most commonly mentioned.

However, of the three sourceless stories in the City One newspaper, two were wrap-ups of the City Three Board of Education meetings.[18] The reporter did not actually attend the meetings but called the superintendent following the meetings, discussed the agenda and was told how the votes went. There was no attribution or acknowledgment of the superintendent in the stories.[19]

Newspapers generally are careful to attribute at least one source within a story in order to demonstrate to the audience that the information is derived from independent sources and is not the opinion of reporters or editors. With no attribution, a sourceless story, such as the one promoting the informational session on the City Three tax levy, may appear to be an opinion and therefore less credible with readers. Sourceless stories such as the City Three meeting follow-ups conducted by phone for the City One newspaper may make it appear the reporter was actually there. Since the reporter was not there and the follow-ups were the result of phone conversations with the superintendent, it actually gives the source total control of the story and thus total control of that part of the agenda presented to the public.

Since this project does not focus on readers, the question of how credible these sourceless stories are to the readers is beyond the scope of the project.

Of the five City Three school board-related stories in the City One newspaper, one was a complimentary profile of the superintendent, two were meetings with information supplied exclusively from the superintendent, and two were follow-ups to the school levy in which no opponents to the levy were quoted, only supporters.

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[18] Although the City Two newspaper covers both City Three and City Two, the stories on the City Three school system were counted among the City Two stories in the content analysis. That is because this study focuses on press practices of the newspaper, rather than the readers' reactions.
[19] City Two education editor interview, 12 April, 1993.

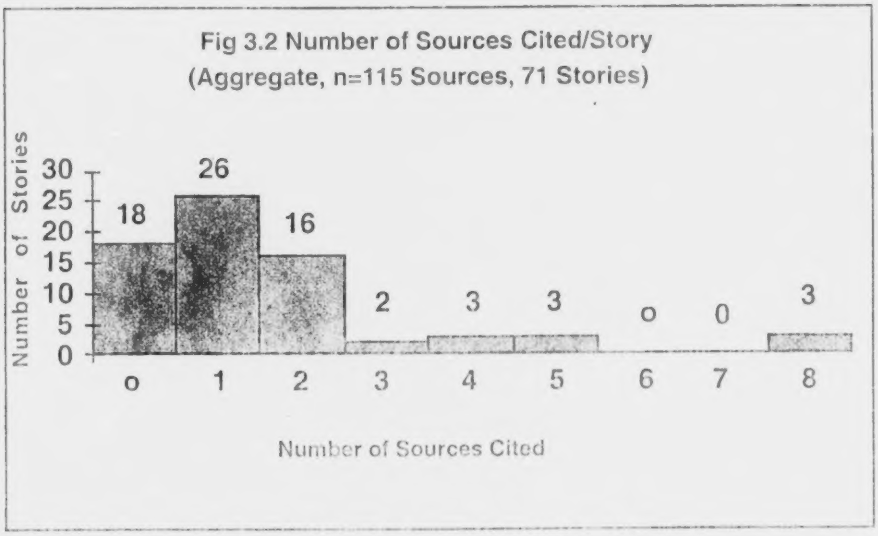


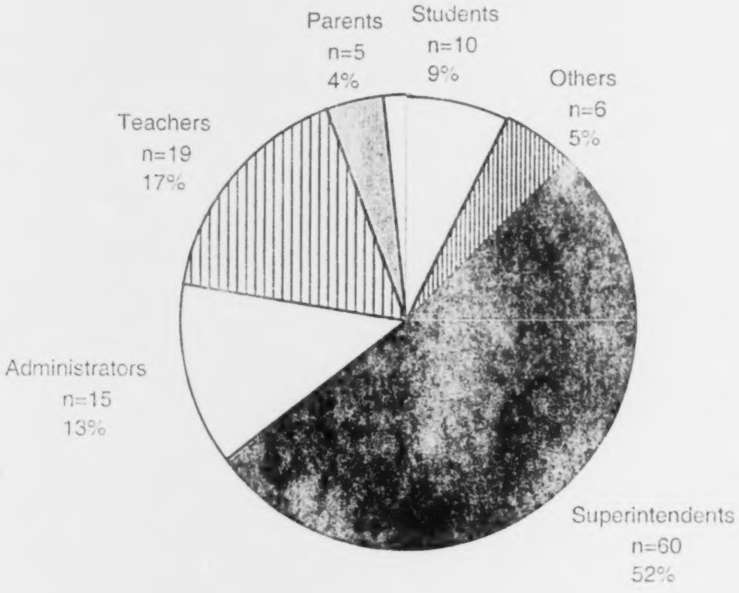
Fig 3.2 Number of Sources Cited/Story
(Aggregate, n=115 Sources, 71 Stories)

The number and nature of sources in the stories overall supports Paletz, Reichert, and McIntyre's assertion of symbolic reassurance. In the aggregate, the plurality of stories, 26, or 36.6 percent, had one source quoted, and in 19 of those stories, 27 percent, the primary source was the superintendent of schools. Other sources included five teachers and two principals discussing programs in their classrooms or schools. Parents and students were never the sources of one-source stories. Eighteen had no sources quoted, as mentioned earlier. Sixteen stories had two sources quoted. In 13 stories, the primary source was the superintendent of schools and the second was an administrator, teacher, or school board member; in the other three, it was a principal or teacher, with support given by the superintendent or a peer. No two-source stories mentioned students or parents.

There were two stories with three people mentioned, three stories with four people quoted, three stories with five people quoted and one story with eight people quoted. Of the three-source stories, in the aggregate, superintendents were mentioned as the lead once, teachers twice. The other sources were students on two occasions and a teacher once. Of the four-source stories, two were City Three school board meetings, and one was about an AIDS education program in City Three.

Of the five-source stories, one was the story about reaction to school route changes in City Two, and one eight-source story was a reaction to City Three's budget cuts. The rest of the multiple-source stories were regular coverage of school board meetings, with either the school board members or the superintendent as the lead source in all instances.[20]

Fig. 3.3 Sources Mentioned in Stories
(Aggregate, n=115 sources mentioned in 71 stories)



Taken together, with a total of 115 sources mentioned or quoted in 71 stories, superintendents were sources 60 times or 52 percent, teachers 19 times or 17 percent, administrators or principals 15 times or 13 percent, students 10 times or nine percent, parents five times or four percent and others six times or five percent. Other sources included parents acting as PTA officials (parents acting in an official capacity), city officials, or business people.

With the official sources dominating the discourse, and with criticism absent except for two letters to the editor in City Two and in the wrap-up after the City Three school levy was defeated,[21] the officials were essentially being portrayed as benign and effective by default.

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[20] Even if sources were mentioned more than once, they were still counted as just one source.

[21] The letters-to-the-editor section in the City Two newspaper is not always next to the editorial page. It is sometimes found near the classified ads or in other places, making it more difficult for readers to find material critical of the school board. Also, letters are clearly opinions of readers, whereas news may be accepted as factual by many. In the two news stories that mentioned a City

With criticism all but absent and the officials' statements going unquestioned by reporters, the audience may well be symbolically reassured of the competence of the school board, whether the members are in reality competent or not.

Taken together, the content analysis shows an overwhelming reliance on public officials as sources, specifically superintendents of schools. Ninety-six percent of the stories were generated by officials or came from meetings, which were controlled by official sources. The remaining four percent, three stories, supported the officials. One was a flattering profile of a superintendent, and the other two were follow-up stories in which supporters of the school board tax levy in City Three were featured more prominently than critics. Such coverage certainly provides symbolic reassurance of the competence of the officials and the irreproachable propriety of their decisions and actions. Criticism of the officials was downplayed when it occurred at all.

Some alternative ideas, no matter their merit, never reached the readers because they were not reported in the press.

Two parent' complaint, the superintendent of schools was mentioned first and most often. The parents were mentioned only after the superintendent's reports on other issues.
In City Three, the school board and superintendent were also mentioned first and foremost, and supporting views among non-official people, mostly parents, dominated. There were only two mildly critical comments, both near the end of the story, and they concerned the lack of funding for the school system rather than any real criticism of the school officials themselves.

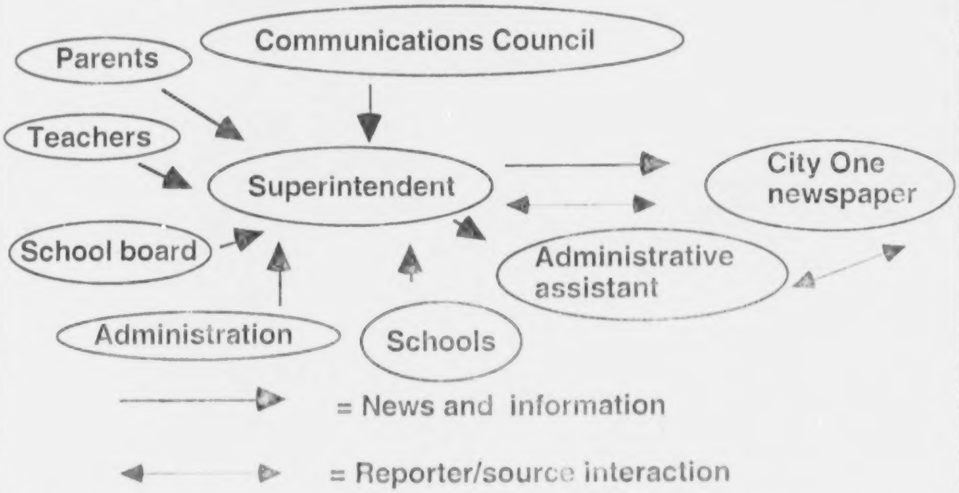
CITY ONE: A CULT OF PERSONALITY

Although each town exhibited unique social interactions between press and policy-makers, the culture in which those interactions occurred essentially yielded one result: heavy reliance upon one person, the superintendent of schools, as a central source for all information provided to the public. This allowed him (each superintendent was a white male) to heavily influence, if not control, the agenda presented to the public on school issues.

In each case, the reason was threefold: the superintendent (or others in a subordinate position to him) went out of the way to provide information, story ideas, and printed material to the reporters in order to influence the agenda presented to the public; the reporters, because of ingrained press practices and the logistical constraints of their jobs, passively accepted and even fostered this activity; and both operated in a "culture of support" in which participants, including journalists, in effect support the school system and discourage dissenting opinions rather than foster criticism or provide policy alternatives on issues.

In City One, the situation was personality-based. The City One superintendent controlled media coverage because of his own active and planned control over the dissemination of information to school officials and the public, coupled with a press corps whose members accepted [illegible] approach without questioning him or themselves. The City One superintendent also worked to stifle questions and conflicts before they became public, which discouraged citizen participation and criticism. There were few examples offered to the public of how to present problems or disagreements.

Fig. 4.1 Agenda Setting in City One


Parents
Communications Council
Teachers
Superintendent
City One newspaper
School board
Administrative assistant
Administration
Schools
= News and information
= Reporter/source interaction

In City One, the superintendent gathered information from assorted sources and presented information or story ideas to the newspaper. He may have provided some information to the administrative assistant and either of them might have answered questions from the press regarding the school system, but the superintendent originated all story ideas and was the only one to facilitate coverage.

The News Sources and Their Rituals

Although each school in the district (four elementary, one junior high school and a high school) had a newsletter sent to parents and the newspaper, the City One superintendent the primary source of information school-wide. He was the only active agenda-setting source for the newspaper during the study period. While the newsletters, mailed directly by school principals, may have provided material for the Sunday school-page stories in the local newspaper, the City One superintendent suggested one of the only two non-meeting generated stories during the study period.[22] This story concerned reaction to cutbacks in rural bus service. He explained that part of the reason for the story was to build community support and understanding for the situation, which involved changes in school bus routes.

The City One superintendent also touted a comprehensive review of the school system, City One 2000, aspects of which were occasionally written about in the City One newspaper, once during the study period.

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[22] The other was a profile of the superintendent in City Three, which was generated by a reporter covering that city.

He said he generally called the newspaper to generate stories and coverage and seldom did the City One newspaper call him for ideas. "I call them more than they call me (for story ideas)," he said. "I know every one at the newspaper...and I call them whenever there's a need," he said.[23]

However, following meetings, he said the City One newspaper reporters "always call for comments and information." This, for all practical purposes, gave him the last word in school coverage.

He enthusiastically worked to ensure positive press coverage. "We have a good relationship with the press and, yes, we do try to grease the wheels...Short of saying they're in my pocket or I'm in theirs, it's (the press coverage) as good as it can be."[24]

The City One superintendent also literally controlled the agenda by preparing the actual written agenda for the school board meetings, as opposed to letting the administrative assistant draw up the list or having the school board president prepare it. The agenda is available to the press and public a week before the meetings, he said. His office mails the agenda to press outlets a week before the meetings, so the list of issues provided to the media for consideration is his. The City One superintendent said he likes no surprises or controversy at meetings or any public function and actively works to eliminate them before they get a public hearing.

His active control squelches any notion of public questioning or dissent.

> The public will never see controversy because I won't have it on the agenda if it's controversial. I work very hard to eliminate controversy (before the board meetings)...and I don't put anything on the agenda they (the board) cannot support. I don't like surprises and they don't like surprises.[25]

While the City One superintendent admitted taking an activist role in resolving conflicts before they became public, at least one critic said he was overzealous to the point of stifling debate and therefore stifling policy options and solutions to problems. The City One critic, the chair of the school system's Communications Council, said many of the problems within the school system "never see the light of day" because of the superintendent's personal approach to communication. She called him "a control freak...He wants everything to look good...He's obsessed."[26]

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[23] City One superintendent interview, 18 April, 1993.

[24] City One superintendent interviewed at Communications Council meeting, 18 March, 1993.

[25] City One superintendent interview, 18 April, 1993.

[26] City One critic interview, City Two, 17 March, 1993. After hearing about the nature of this project, City One critic took the researcher aside for a lengthy discussion in the parking lot of the Middle School, where the school board meetings were held. Though

Press Practices and Rituals

The reporter's role and practices were also structured to support the status quo and discourage public participation. The officials and the press, in effect, worked together to foster a "culture of support," in which a challenge to the status quo was viewed as damaging to the school system and therefore detrimental to the education of children in City One. The City One superintendent actively nurtured that culture and the reporters passively accepted it without question.

The reporters and editors of the City One newspaper were willing participants in this culture. They did not seek alternative sources or reactions from parents or teachers to school board policies, programs or activities. The reporters believed they were doing a good job and were being "objective," and not taking any sides. When asked about the role of the newspaper in the community regarding school policy issues, the City One newspaper city editor only said: "to report news accurately and objectively." However, he also said that in school events and sports, the job of the paper is to build support rather than to criticize or to give voice to other criticism.[27]

The "objective" reporting described by the editor relied primarily on one gatekeeper of information more than any other single source; that gatekeeper was the superintendent of schools. When the reporters "apprised" the community about issues, at least during the study period, the information came from him, as demonstrated by the content analysis.

The ritual of preparation for meeting coverage, according to the education reporter, was to first read the agenda, then call the superintendent to find out any additional information or quotations necessary to produce an "advance story" on the meeting. The subsequent story described what was expected to go on, what issues were to be discussed, etc. The City One superintendent was not necessarily quoted in the advance story unless he said a direct quotation to illustrate information. No City One journalist had any qualms about the sourceless stories.

Other story ideas came from announcements and flyers sent by the schools themselves. Mostly these announcements ended up on the Sunday school-page. The education reporter said the story ideas came from discussions with teachers and staff. Sometimes, she said, staff or teachers were reluctant to talk to her, but the City One superintendent "takes care of that when that happens."

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the meeting was informal, she was aware of copious note-taking and was informed her comments were part of this project.

[27] City editor interview, 18 April, 1993. During the study period, the features editor covered the school board in City One, though that was usually the education reporter's job. The reporters occasionally exchanged beats in order to give them a broad view of the community. All three were interviewed separately on the same day.

During the study period, however, only one non-meeting issue-related story was printed, concerning the re-routing of buses. That story was generated by the City One superintendent, who said he suggested the story as a means to build support for the changes.[28]

No reporter said that they consulted parents or members of the community about stories. The exception is "when they (issues that are critical to the school system) arise at a meeting," the education reporter said.

In the one example in which a parent's concern arose at a meeting, a parent's complaint about the graduation speaker, the issue was handled in two paragraphs. The features editor explained that she wavered about mentioning it at all since the City One superintendent handled the issue the next day by calling the woman up and explaining the situation, thus ending any ill will.[29]

The features editor, who also covered the school system, echoed the City One superintendent's sentiments, wondering whether the issue should have arisen at all. She said she felt uncomfortable providing a forum for somebody "who didn't go through the proper channels."[30] Her unquestioning support for the City One superintendent's assumption that a parent who questions the school board is acting improperly illustrates the culture of support. In that culture, the status quo is supported and the burden of proof of the validity of criticism, commentary, or alternative ideas rests on the person presenting that information. Insiders, such as the superintendent, do not face doubt or scrutiny when they make suggestions or present information.

The education reporter said she also listened to the critical comments from the teachers' union, but the City One critic said that she does not go to the press because they "are in the superintendent's pocket."[31] The parent concerned about graduation was the only person who expressed a discordant note in the press during the study period.

The education reporter said that she saw no need to cover any issues that came up as a result of Communications Council meetings. "These things are done in private (Communications Council and executive sessions during meetings) to protect the privacy of the staff," she said.[32] Again, this assumption of good intentions and effectiveness are an example of the journalist's role in nurturing the culture of support.

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[28] City One superintendent interview, 4 May, 1993.

[29] When contacted by the researcher, the woman refused comment without explanation, and the City One superintendent just said that the issue was resolved.

[30] Features editor interview, 18 April, 1993.

[31] City One critic interview, 18 March, 1993. The City One superintendent used the same phrase when asked about the nature of the coverage.

[32] Feature editor interview, 18 April, 1993. She had no knowledge of the gun found in a school a year earlier.

She also said the major flaw in the coverage was a lack of stories on finance, health and family issues.[33] She said she did not think the community understood a school's financial needs, although she wrote a story in January explaining the school system's finances. However, she said she did not believe that there was any shortage of information critical to the school system or a lack of alternative viewpoints. "All schools are open, (City One schools) moreso than most. We have no problem with access and find whatever we want," the City One education reporter said.[34] She added that she had "total trust" in the City One superintendent's judgment because he admitted mistakes. For example, the board once held an illegal meeting (because of improper advance notice), and the City One superintendent called the City One newspaper immediately afterward to tell her about it. By doing so, he maintained control of the agenda presented to the audience regarding the meeting because he was the one who provided all the information regarding the meeting. There was no article reporting the school board's failure to properly notify the the public about the meeting, the reporter said.

Her handling of the situation demonstrates the culture of support. Since there was never a story about the illegal meeting, the superintendent was never held up to any criticism from any audience members.

While the members of the press generally agreed with school officials on most questions, they had a difference of opinion in one area. While the school officials said the vast majority of the decisions in City One were made in advance of the meetings, the journalists said they believed the decision making was made in public. The city editor, features editor, and education reporter respectively said that 25 percent, 20 percent, and 15 percent of the issues were decided before the meetings.

The behavior and routines of the journalists were not surprising. Such rituals demonstrate the learned behavior reported by Breed and Tuchman, who in their studies of newsrooms found that younger reporters learned the meaning of "objectivity" from older reporters and editors. The features editor was on the job 12 years during the study period, the city editor, five years, and the education reporter,three. The features editor admitted helping teach new reporters, including the education reporter.

Since the City One superintendent actively tried to control the information presented by the City One newspaper and the journalists on the paper willingly accepted his approach, he was effective in his efforts to control the agenda presented to the community on school issues. The lack of information from any other source, even other school officials or board members, further centralized his control because no alternative sources of information or opinion were presented to the public. Even if the citizens of City One wanted to go to an alternate source of information about any issue facing the school, they could not determine the identity of any other source by reading the City One newspaper.

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[33] Finance, family issues, and health care are headings in the City One Superintendent's City One 2000 plan.

[34] Education reporter interview, 18 April, 1993.

The centralized control of information kept the public in the dark about such issues as the problems of behaviorally impaired students or a gun in the school. The City One superintendent's activism and the City One newspaper's acquiescence combined to produce that effect.

As in the Paletz, Reichert, and McIntyre study, the City One superintendent and the school system were placed on a pedestal, and the status quo was promoted and preserved. The City One superintendent stifled any challenges to the status quo and an acquiescent press helped him, since they all operated in the culture of support in which the good intentions and effectiveness of school officials were not questioned. As in the Northwestern studies, any information that did go to the public came from one official source more than any other: the superintendent of schools.

In City One, alternative viewpoints or problems were addressed well before they reached the public. The agenda presented to the press on school issues, then, was a fait accompli, sanitized of [illegible]

The newspaper saw no problem with the status quo and seldom questioned the information coming from the official sources. Realizing this, groups like the teachers on the Communications Council did not go to the press with their concerns.

The system, then, discourages public participation except as support of pre-formed policies. Problems are resolved or quashed before the public gets a chance to look at the issues, which may exclude alternative solutions.

The public cannot mobilize to address problems if they never hear about them. The mobilization model is not working in City One.

CITY TWO: CULTURE AND CLASS

City Two's school system-press relationship was more complicated than City One's. While the superintendent was still the center of the policy-information dissemination system, he was not alone. He was actively aided by a part-time (20 hours a week) public relations coordinator who supervised a full-time operation, staffed by clerical personnel and students from City Two State University.

The City Two superintendent was not an active agenda setter like the City One superintendent. Rather, he was an integral part of a system in which the result was essentially the same: the school system produced most of the information about itself and provided, in City Two's case, all of the story ideas presented in the press during the study period.

As in City One, the system operated in a culture of support, in which newspaper reporters and editors were predisposed to support the school system through their practices and rituals.

In the study period, the debate during the school board meetings and much of the behind-the-scenes discussion centered on the complaint of a stepfather over his access to his stepson while the boy was at school. The parent claimed that the school system was unresponsive to his needs, in part because he was not of the same social class as educators and school officials. The issue allowed the researcher to ask questions about class divisions in City Two of several informants in the study.[35]

While the Board of Education members in City Two spoke more at the meetings than in City One and about the same as in City Three, most votes were unanimous. In fact, in the April 5 meeting, all votes were unanimous. As in City One, issues were seldom discussed in public before votes were taken.

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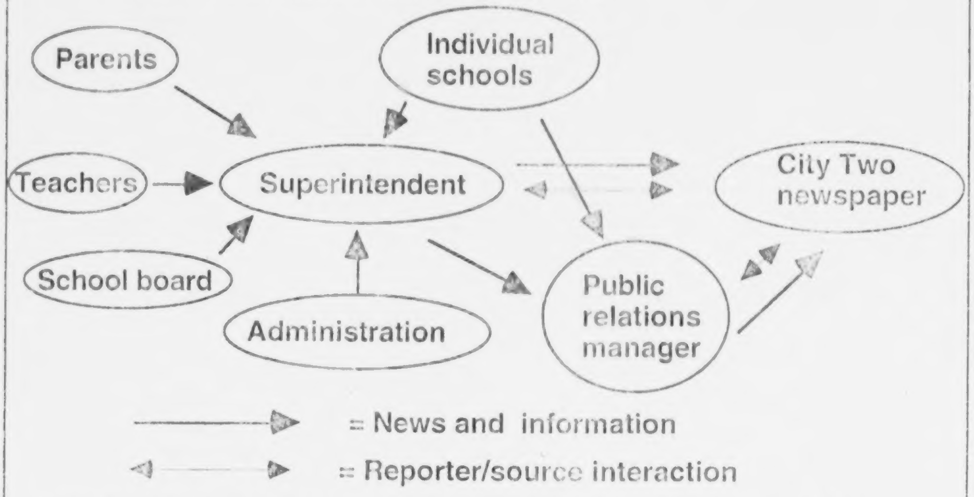
[35] The least cooperative participant was the man who made the complaint. Since he worked two jobs, he was never available when the researcher called him at home. He did not return phone calls, and he refused to speak for this project at public meetings. He did say once, when asked about his situation, that the researcher, wearing a jacket and tie, looked like "one of them."

Even without the strong personal involvement of the superintendent, the press practices of the City Two newspaper fostered the culture of support by publishing, almost verbatim, most of the press releases sent in by the public relations office and, as in the other newspapers under study, relying on the superintendent as the primary source of information for any policy-related stories.

During the study period, the City Two education editor, who usually covered the city's education issues, did not perform her regular duties of reporting on the school board. Another reporter filled in for the education editor for six months, initially because of a car breakdown. The other reporter, who usually covered outlying areas in the county, could not make her usual rounds and was then shifted to cover the City [illegible] school system. This reporter, who was at the paper eight months when the study began, had little familiarity with the beat and relied on the education editor and the Public Relations manager to guide her.

So although the personalities and systems in City One and City Two were essentially very different, the resulting agenda presented to the readers of the City Two newspaper was quite similar: it was an agenda formed by school officials and presented unquestioningly by the press to the public.

Fig. 5.1 Agenda Setting in City Two



In City Two, the primary source of information for the newspaper was the public relations manager's office. The PR office took story ideas and press releases from individual schools and presented them to the newspaper, which published them with minimal editing. Other story ideas came directly from the superintendent's office. The superintendent also obtained information from teachers, students or other sources. The superintendent also had direct interaction with the newspaper. Only the superintendent and the PR manager had direct contact with the newspaper staff members during the study period.

News Sources and Their Rituals

The system emerged in its current form with the inception of the public relations office in 1969. The public relations manager, who also served 20 hours a week as an art teacher, was the only person ever to occupy the position. He developed his own job description and those of the interns and staff. The 1969 school board accepted his plan. After more than 20 years, the public relations office operated the same way.

From the beginning, the job of communicating with the public did not seek to involve them in school issues. Rather, the role of communication was to foster support for programs and policies already enacted. His 1969 proposal begins: "Public relations is the process of creating a favorable image of the City Two city schools by communicating to the general public."[36]

In order to create that positive image, the proposal says the school should take an activist approach, telling people what to think about. In short, the school system attempts to set the public's agenda on school issues.

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[36] City Two Public Relations Manager, "Building Better Schools and Communities through Education, A Public Relations Guide," 1969:1.

The first basic strategy of communications is the strategy of taking the initiative, not the defensive. It is easier to shape an opinion than to change an opinion. The best defense is a good offense...There is also the strategy of authority...The school board and the superintendent should be the chief spokesman and chief molders in the field of education in their communities.[37]

Of course, molding public opinion is related to agenda building. By actively providing information to the audience on educational issues, the City Two education department was providing an agenda on school issues. With the support of the rituals of the news-gathering process in the local media, that agenda-building process went largely unimpeded from source to media and, in turn, to the public.

The primary medium which molded opinions in City Two was the newspaper. It was "by far" the most important news outlet, the City Two public relations manager said. The education page was particularly important; it was a daily section consisting mostly of press releases provided by his office. He also said that the regional newspaper's primary interest was the sensational and that there was little television coverage.

The public relations director saw the role of the newspaper, including the news pages as well as the school pages, as a tool to create and preserve a positive image of the school system, thus fostering the culture of support. "The newspaper should support their school system. If there is corruption, it should cover that, but beyond that, any news media should be supportive (of the school system). We are not enemies to the community."[38]

By tacitly agreeing with the role set out for it by the public relations office, the newspaper was actively participating in the culture of support. The education editor perpetuated this culture of support by handing down the sources, protocols, and rituals of coverage to her replacement.

The PR manager, in particular, viewed the education section as an apparatus by which to build public support, even though it was published by an independent newspaper.[39] It contained between four and 12 stories a day during the study period. The stories concerning City Two were produced by students from City Two State University, who interned in the PR manager's office. Other school systems in outlying areas also supplied press releases and information for the school page, but they were beyond the scope of this study. "They (the newspaper) provide the space. We provide the stories and opportunities (regarding City Two) for students," the PR manager said. He noted that the newspaper generally publishes the stories unedited, "pretty much as we provide it."[40]

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[37] City Two Public Relations Manager, page 3.

[38] Public relations manager interview.

[39] The newspapers in Cities One and Three also had weekly education pages, but editors and educators in neither city could provide much background or analysis of the role of the pages. It was just a traditional part of the paper, which provided program announcements, honor rolls, and school menus. While it may have fostered community support, only City Two educators and journalists expressed any thought about the pages. The City One superintendent called it a "good feature." And the City Three superintendent just said he liked it. The journalists in both cities saw it only as community service and did not elaborate further.

The education page, consisting of unedited stories produced by the school system, functioned, then, as an arm of the public relations office, rather than an independent news outlet. Student interns who wrote the articles for the page were instructed that their purpose was: "to help create a favorable image of the school system...creating this image is what your job is about."[41]

In order to do that job, the students were assigned to the various schools and asked administrators and teachers for story ideas. In the aggregate, the student interns produced 34 stories for analysis during the study period. Eight of these had no sources cited at all, five mentioned the superintendent of schools as the primary source, eight mentioned principals as the primary source, eight mentioned teachers, three mentioned counselors or other administrators, and two mentioned students. The public relations director approved and edited all of these stories.

After the stories were written and edited, the public relations director hand-delivered them to the newspaper three times a week. The actual story ideas for the school page, according to the public relations manager, came from teachers and administrators after he called the school for ideas. Although the student intern handbook instructs the interns to seek out sources within the assigned schools, 21 of the 34 school page stories came from the public relations manager. He said that the administrators often come to him as soon as they wish a program publicized, before the students even ask about the programs. The stories on the school page, then, came directly from the administrators to the public relations manager to the City Two newspaper 21 out of 34 times.

So, while many voices, more than in other cities, appeared in stories in the school page of the City Two newspaper, they were orchestrated by a central authority who wished to build public support of the school system. These voices, primarily those of administrators and teachers, came directly from the school system itself. Alternative sources or viewpoints from parents or the community were not mentioned, or even sought. The agenda presented to the public on the school

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[40] Interview, City Two News and Community Relations Director, 10, April, 1993.
[41] "A Public Relations Guide for Interns at City Two City Schools," City Two News and Community Relations Director, 1.

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page, then, was entirely provided by school officials who used one primary conduit: the public relations manager.

The public relations manager might not have had such direct control over the news pages once he had submitted his material, but he did have a great deal of influence. During the study period, the only school stories appearing elsewhere in the paper concerned school board meetings. The public relations director supplied the press, the public, and the researcher with the most detailed agenda of the project, complete with addenda concerning budgetary matters, names of companies, award winners, and other information. The April 5 agenda ran 22 pages, complete with bid specifications and the salaries of every school employee. The shortest agenda in the other cities was a one-page agenda of May 2 in City One and the longest elsewhere was five pages in City Three on May 5.

The public relations manager set up a "press table" in front of the audience, segregating the press from parents, students, and audience members, thus helping him to influence the content of newspaper articles. He usually appeared a half hour before the meetings to set up microphones and answer questions from the first reporters to arrive. Throughout the meetings, he explained to the City Two newspaper reporter the nature of the proceedings, providing names and other information, whether she asked questions or not.[42]

Press Practices and Rituals

The rituals and the practices of the reporters essentially reinforce the officials' positions and may very well reinforce the perception of class distinctions. Indeed, the journalists' practices provide a model for the culture of support. For example, the City Two public relations manager sat next to the reporters and provided background, explanations, and supplementary information to the reporters, whether they asked for it or not. The reporters sat separately from the audience, unlike in Cities One and Three, further discouraging reporter interaction with members of the public.

The reporters dressed in much the same manner as the officials: professionally, rather than as casually as the rural parents. In many journalism classes and early in their careers, young reporters are encouraged to dress professionally in order to be "taken seriously" by official sources. The comments of the stepparent regarding the researcher's clothes may indicate that a professional appearance may discourage or intimidate some people from talking to reporters; the journalists appear to be more like the officials than like those who dress more casually, and thus the reporters may appear more sensitive to those who represent the status quo.

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[42] He was also among the most eager supporters of this project. He supplied lists of personnel, salaries, and guidebooks to the school system and sat with the researcher throughout board meetings to answer any questions.

In City Two, the reporters actually were more sensitive to the needs of the officials than to the parents. The City Two newspaper education editor said that whenever any questions arose, whether in regard to schools, parents, or other education issues, she went directly to the superintendent, just as in City One. "He has everything I need most of the time and when he doesn't, he (or the public relations manager) tells me where to find it."[43] When necessary, she said, her secondary sources, consulted after the superintendent or the PR manager, include other administrators, teachers, guest speakers, and very rarely, students.[44]

During the study period, all stories in the City Two newspaper were generated either through meetings or through press releases provided by the public relations manager. The education editor could not provide any examples of stories in which she did not go to official sources first.

Also, the public relations manager had unusual access to the newspaper after the articles were written but before they went to print. He often visited the newspaper office before the paper was printed and reviewed the articles on the layout board. He was encouraged to review the actual stories and suggest substantive changes, not just to point out typographical errors. The newspaper granted him the access, the education editor said, to ensure accuracy. She noted since the public relations manager's office generated the majority of stories, his presence assured that any changes due to editing did not affect the substance of the stories. [45]

He was also free to take issue with stories his office did not supply, such as stories produced by other reporters, virtually giving him the authority of an editor. However, neither the PR manager or the education editor could cite any instance in which the PR manager made substantive changes in any story, no matter what its source. After working together for more than 20 years, she said "we generally agree on what's important."

While both agreed the primary purpose of the school system's communications program was to build support rather than to foster public participation, the education editor was a willing, if tacit, participant in that effort. She believed the public interest was best served by delivering information to the public, rather than obtaining information from them, again challenging the mobilization model. As she said:

> We're here to inform the public (about the school system). Our job is to get things right, to tell the truth. The superintendent and (the public relations manager)

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[43] City Two newspaper education editor interview, 7 May, 1993.

[44] Interviews with students were arranged through the Public Relations Manager's Office.

[45] The public relations manager said he was looking primarily for inaccuracies and omissions to "avoid mistakes before they happen."

supply the information. They're the ones who know what's going on more than anybody. If you want the best information, you have to go to them.[46]

Of course, the truth and information she delivers is the truth according to the school system's official sources. The assumption that the officials are the best, most truthful sources of information as well as the most convenient is the basic assumption underlying the culture of support: since the officials supply the best "truth," it is unnecessary to consider alternative versions of that truth. The education editor did not believe the newspaper should foment any participation. She said that she believed it is up to the individual to make his or her own choices concerning information about the school system and that it was inappropriate for the newspaper to encourage or discourage participation in the policy-making process. However, she said she did not believe her coverage discouraged public participation.

By providing symbolic reassurance through continued, regular, positive coverage of the school system, according to Paletz, Reichert, and McIntyre, the public may not believe participation is necessary. After all, if officials are doing their jobs, they may not need new ideas from members of the public.

The editor also said that the newspaper had a defined role as a builder of support for the school system. "If the school officials are doing good jobs and our stories help people become aware of it, we're doing our job, too," she said.[47]

She also said she did not believe she was missing anything by not consulting more parents, students, or other sources independently. "We get all the information we need from them" (the school officials, generally the superintendent or the public relations manager). When specifically asked about the stepparent at the meetings who had the problem with access to his stepchild, she said she did not think it was necessary to talk to him following the meeting because school officials "obviously knew what they were doing...and if that's the case, there's really no need to look elsewhere."

She could not provide any examples of occasions where she thought it was necessary to consult parents, teachers, or others who disagreed with school officials.

She also saw no need to come up with more independently generated story ideas on the school system, again, because she believed fair and accurate information was provided by school officials. Her major problem with the news coverage was that she believed she had inadequate time and space to do justice to the "wonderful people" of the school system. While those limitations kept the paper from giving as much detail as she would have liked, she believed the school system received good, accurate coverage.[48]

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[46] City Two Education Editor interview, 7 May, 1993.

[47] City Two Education Editor interview, 7 May, 1993.

The City Two superintendent said his only problem with the reporting during the study period was that he felt the editor's replacement reporter did not provide enough details concerning his side of the dispute with the parent in the first meeting story. The education editor said she agreed but the "omission" was caused by space and time constraints of the paper. Overall, she said, she believed her replacement did a good job.

Tuchman wrote that reporters are socialized to follow the rituals of more experienced reporters as a way to achieve advancement. The replacement reporter who covered the school board meeting stories during the study period said she followed closely the direction and example of the education editor, noting she (the editor) was the expert in the field and she (the replacement reporter) enjoyed learning from her. [49]

The education editor also agreed with the superintendent in his observation that rural residents or those of lower socioeconomic classes felt some antipathy toward the school officials, but she did not see any need to change any of her practices because of it. She saw no need to reach out to talk to rural residents or non-official sources any more than she did.

> That's always been there (the tension between the rural residents and the officials). There's not much we[50] can do. The school system goes out of their way to reach out and address their concerns. [51]

When asked, she said she did not see those tensions as newsworthy and saw no reason to pursue stories on socioeconomic class divisions "until they became an issue." At the time she did not see the problems with rural residents and their attitudes as an issue.

The school board member who is a college professor said he believed the local newspaper does "an excellent job" covering school issues and noted the education editor's experience gave her expertise and accuracy. While he was quoted in several meeting stories, he said that he seldom talked to reporters in interviews before or after meetings or in other contexts. After all, the public relations manager and the superintendent had more background information on almost any issue than he did, he said.

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[48] When the researcher repeatedly asked if people such as parents were left out of news coverage or if there were problems, the education editor either gave very short "yes or no" responses or praised school officials as sources.

[49] Upon the retirement of the education editor in 1995, the replacement reporter was named to succeed her.

[50] She referred to herself and school officials as "we" and the rural residents as "they."

[51] City Two Education Editor interview, 7 May, 1993.

He also said he believed the public had "unusual opportunities" to affect policy because they were allowed to speak at public hearings. "When they express something at a hearing, we look into it. A lot of times it is taken care of before it ever gets to us, but when it does, we take care of it." [52]

When asked how the school board members take care of such issues, he said they generally refer interested parents and parties back to school officials or, after talking to parents or others, the school board members go to school officials themselves to provide information or referral services. School board members, then, at best, become intermediaries, and the concerns of parents and others are still met by the superintendent or someone under his supervision. The problems were still generally resolved before they were reported in the press.

Overall, the school coverage of the newspaper in City Two supports both the Paletz, Reichert, and McIntyre studies and the Northwestern studies. The rituals and routines of the newspaper implicitly and explicitly support the school system. Though the education editor denied actively trying to build community support for the school system, she passively did so by giving school officials carte blanche: they produce articles, which are printed almost verbatim, and the officials are given the opportunity to ensure the articles are printed as they wish.

Since the officials were actively trying to build support for the school system and its initiatives, and their efforts to do so are supported by the newspaper and its practices, the newspaper was indeed a tool of the school officials in building community support. By reporting and printing stories from the school officials unquestioned and unimpeded, including stories generated by the public meetings at which the public relations manager coached[53] the reporters on what to write, the agenda of the school officials was the agenda presented to the audience.

The rituals of the reporters truly supported the status quo.

The mobilization model obviously does not work here. The newspaper reporters did not seek out parents or other parties, and if those parties went to the newspaper with their concerns, they would ultimately be referred to school officials anyway, according to the education editor. [54]

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[52] City Two school board member interview, 8 May, 1993.

[53] While he objected to the term "coach," he sat next to the reporters and provided unsolicited information and opinions on the issues being discussed as well as making suggestions as to what was important and what was not for publication.

[54] The education editor could not remember a time when a parent or a non-official source supplied a story idea that made it into print. She said critical story ideas from non-officials were generally personally motivated or showed a lack of understanding of

As in the investigative reports in the Northwestern studies, in this routine situation, any reports on problems or solutions to problems originate with official sources and are presented already solved to the press, making school officials appear to be effective.

In City Two, it seems possible that parents, students, or non-participants in the culture of support might not seek to provide policy alternatives, complaints, or other insights because they felt they would not be included or welcome in the process. If they went to the press, the reporters would refer them to the officials, and the result would be the same: the articles in the newspapers would not be printed until official sources thoroughly reviewed their contents with the reporters.

In City Two, the school coverage was produced by a culture of support in which school officials were presumed to be the best sources of information. Non-official sources were discounted. It is possible that the rural critics had a point: if the officials were the experts trusted by the journalists, then the residents were not expert, and their opinions were considered less valuable by the journalists because they came from uninformed sources. The rural residents were, in fact, looked down upon by the journalists and the officials.

Even if the non-official sources were not as well-informed as the school officials, their concerns were not addressed or shared with a wider public. Their concerns were addressed by school officials only, and resolved or ignored before the press was aware of them.

If the unofficial sources did produce valuable insights or policy alternatives,they were expressed in print only after a review by school officials, when at all.

There was no alternative to, and no way around, the culture of support in City Two.

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the issues involved. Such unfavorable story ideas are either ignored or referred to school officials, she said.

CITY THREE: A CULTURE FACES DEFEAT

Although the study aimed to focus on routine news coverage and practices, each town had different issues to face. Just before the study period began, the City Three Board of Education gained approval for a vote on a 7.9 mill tax levy to offset potential deficits.

Despite unanimous support among school officials, a school board-sponsored campaign that included a voter education session and the endorsement of the local media,[55] the levy was defeated 2,619 to 1,183, or 68.9 percent against and 31.1 percent [56] in favor of the tax hike. The school officials expressed surprise following the defeat, citing the fact there was no organized opposition. Some residents complained following the referendum that the school board was aloof and unresponsive. Throughout the policy-making process, the school board insulated itself by reaching out to its supporters and effectively discouraging dissent through its practices and rituals. The school board ended up "preaching to the choir," so the residents expressed their concern with their votes rather than by their involvement in the policy-making process. In addition, by covering the meetings without reporting on the dissent within the meetings, the board's aloofness was exaggerated in the press coverage, illustrating the contentions of Paletz, Reichert , and McIntyre.[57]

The school levy defeat, and the surprise with which it was met by school officials, illustrates the shortcomings of the culture of support. As in the other cities, the school officials worked actively to use the newspaper to build support. The newspaper was acquiescent, and its stories quoted school officials rather than potential opponents to the tax levy. Indeed, the paper made no effort to seek out alternative voices, nor did the school board

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[55] The City Three newspaper ran stories describing information sessions and organizational meetings to voters. Opponents to the tax levy were never quoted until after the vote.

[56] The City Three newspaper printed the correct vote tallies but calculated the percentages as 59.1 to 40.9 percent, "Voters Overwhelmingly Defeat 7.9-Mill Operating Levy in Primary," City Three Newspaper, 6 May, 1993.

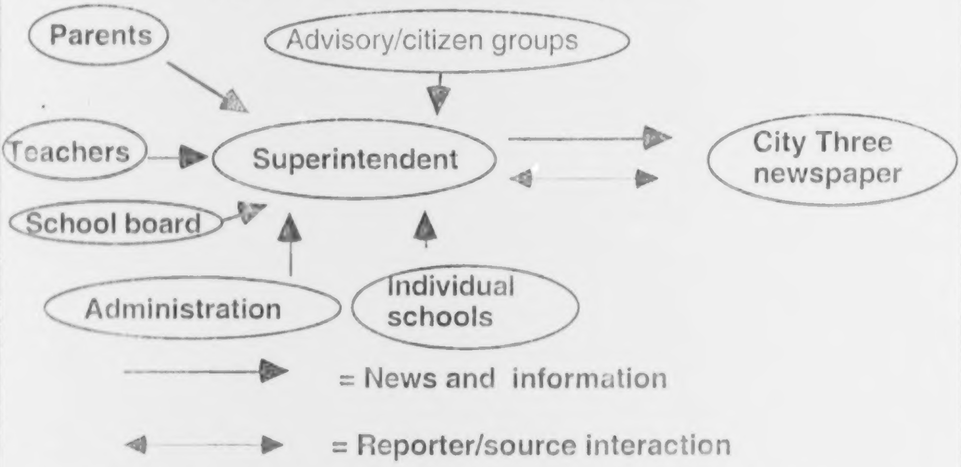
[57] The City Three Superintendent, unlike his counterpart in City Two, said he did not believe there was a resentment between higher and lower socioeconomic classes in his district. While the researcher talked to some levy opponents after the vote, none expressed class issues directly. However, they did characterize school officials as "out of touch," and one said "they don't know what real people face." This might have indicated some class consciousness. Also, there were no active or organized groups working against the tax levy, making it difficult to identify key informants who could explain the reasons for opposing the tax levy beyond making some general comments.

At school board meetings, and at an information session in which school officials presented handouts along with charts and graphs supporting the levy, no one spoke out against it, and very few people asked questions.

School officials expected to win the vote, and they expressed a great deal of surprise to the researcher the day of the vote. Because alternative voices were left out of the discourse before and during policy formation, school officials seemed removed or disinterested in alternatives. The coverage in the newspaper amplified that perception of disinterest, and thus dissenters and alternative voices were discouraged from speaking or taking part in the policy-making process.

If dissenters are not involved in the process as policies are formed, they may react as the voters did in City Three: rejecting the initiatives of the officials. If school officials heard the voices of their opponents, they might have tailored their presentations, plans, and policies to be more palatable to their constituents.[58]

Fig. 6.1 Agenda Setting in City Three



In City Three, the superintendent gathered information from assorted sources and presented information or story ideas to the press. He was the only person who worked directly with the media. All press releases from the various schools were released through his office. While school board members, parents, teachers and othersspoke at meetings, they appeared at his invitation, and with his approval.

News Sources and Their Rituals

As with the school boards in the other cities, the primary source of information in the City Three school system was the superintendent of schools. During the study period, there was no administrative assistant or public relations officer to aid him. The superintendent had only been in his position for five months. His predecessor had left for a larger school system the previous summer, and the superintendent, who was previously assistant superintendent, had filled in on an interim basis. In January, he was named as permanent superintendent.[59] The communications system, at least on a day-to-day operational basis, totally centered on him. The superintendent handled almost all dealings with the press, and he also reviewed publications from the various schools, including notices, bulletins, and information on athletic events before they were sent out. All press reports during the study period either came as the result of meetings, were follow-ups from the referendum, or were generated by press releases written by principals or the superintendent himself and approved by him.

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[58] Overall, school officials in City Three were the most interested in this project. They often offered help and had the highest response rate to questions. They were the friendliest, most accessible group with whom the researcher worked on this project.

The school board, however, was more vocal, at least at board meetings, and the local newspaper quoted them more often than board members were quoted in other cities[60] During the study period, there were only four stories with the superintendent mentioned or quoted as the only source and five with school board members quoted in addition to him. In City One, there were six stories with the superintendent only and three with school board members (all the result of meetings). In City Two, there were 24 stories mentioning the superintendent and eight with school board members mentioned or quoted as well, three from meetings and five generated by the public relations manager.

Press Practices and Rituals

The job of presenting the concerns of the school board and its reasons for the mill levy was left to the two daily newspapers (in City One and City Three) and the local radio station. "When we work with them (the media), it's not just me, it's people who are balanced and fair to all sides," the superintendent noted.[61]

However, he did describe the stance of the media outlets as "less than neutral" on the issue and said they leaned toward support of the school levy. He also said they did a good job explaining complicated issues like school finances to the public: While he perhaps believed that media outlets did a good job, there were no articles in either publication during the study period that specifically addressed or explained the school levy. The two local newspapers both supported the levy in editorials, but the news coverage only announced meetings and forums before the events and presented general wrap-ups after the meetings.

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[59] At the time of the study, there was no active search to find a new assistant superintendent, and with the defeat of the levy, the school board was considering eliminating the position permanently.

[60] The school board chairman said that the board members had traditionally talked openly and freely, being open to disagreements. Since the superintendent had been with the school system in various capacities for 15 years, they did not feel any need to change their relationship with the superintendent.

[61] City Three superintendent interview, 28 April, 1993.

The editor and the reporter of the City Three newspaper both said they would have liked to have had more depth in their coverage, but the structure of their jobs prevented them from doing so. The reporter who covered the school system worked simultaneously in the production department of the newspaper and said there was insufficient time for him to do much enterprise reporting. Before his tenure at the paper, the editor covered education, but he also had administrative and other reporting duties simultaneously.

Despite the time limitations, the reporter and editor both felt the tax levy would be defeated, while the superintendent did not. "It's not going to pass...We have a few letters but there's nothing organized, so it's hard to get in touch (with the opposition)...There are a lot of people out there who don't come to us, who we don't know and who don't listen to us or them (school officials) They've already made up their mind (against the tax levy)." [62]

Though the newspaper supported the levy in editorials and claimed to be balanced in its news reporting, the coverage showed only the school officials' side of the story. Only school officials were quoted in stories discussing the school levy. These stories included the two regular school board meeting stories, an advance announcement of the information forum and a story of the [illegible] itself. No parent or opponent was mentioned in any of the coverage, making it effectively pro-levy. The editor claimed he tried to contact a person who wrote a letter against the levy in order to write a story, but that person had "unjustifiable reasons" to oppose it. [63] No story was written.

Also, though there were other events and forums for input from parents, such as the PTA, the newspaper never sought them out, the editor said. Rather, they waited for such groups to come before the school board before articles were written about them. Since these groups appeared at the meetings by invitation of school officials, any information coming from them was likely to be promotional or supportive of school board activities and policies.

The City One reporter who covered education in City Three was also limited by time constraints. In addition to the schools, she was also the primary reporter for the entire county, covering courts, government, and other issues as well as the school system. Thus, she, too, limited herself largely to meeting coverage and even then, she often covered the meetings without attending them. She called the superintendent the next day and reviewed the list of items on the agenda, giving him almost total control of what went in the paper. These stories had no byline, nor were any sources mentioned. The reporter did not attend the March 17 meeting in City Three, yet there was a story in the next day's paper, which was generated from a phone call to the superintendent, although no sources were mentioned in the story.

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[62] City Three newspaper editor interview, 23 April, 1993.

[63] City Three newspaper editor interview, 23 April, 1993.

The Tax Levy Defeat and Its Aftermath

After the referendum, some of the differences between the school board and the constituents became clear. The school officials had not reached a large segment of the community with their advocacy of the levy, and at an emergency open forum, several residents accused the school officials of being unresponsive and out of touch. At the same time, the school officials and their supporters looked upon the residents as being unresponsive to their needs as well.

It took a confrontation at an informal meeting for the two sides to communicate directly. The residents showed their concern for the issues at the voting booths, and not at the controlled forums provided for the press at the board meetings.

On voting day, school officials, volunteers, and parents waited for results in the high school cafeteria. There was an election-day, party-headquarters-type tote board on a blackboard to count the vote tally, as each voting district reported its results.

Shortly after the polls closed, it was clear that the tax levy would be defeated. Not only were the proponents surprised, they were discouraged. One volunteer, who had done some canvassing and said she had heard several friends criticize the school board for being removed from the residents, looked around the room and said she would not get involved in another campaign to help raise money for the school system. "You don't have to hit this mule too many times," she said.

The school board chairman said he believed the result was due to a general anti-tax sentiment on the part of the public, rather than to a lack of support for the school system or resentment against the school system.

The chairman of the campaign committee was a local farmer who had prepared for the campaign by attending a state conference on campaigning and marketing in Columbus.[64] He believed demographics were the primary problem. He said that the farming population in the rural districts in which the levy was most soundly defeated was generally older, with grown children, so they no longer saw a direct need to support the school system. He did not believe that the school board failed to tailor messages to dissenters. "I'm not sure you can get them to understand," he said.

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[64] His attendance was funded through private donations, not taxpayer money.

The following day, several residents made it clear they felt school officials were aloof and unresponsive. That perceived unresponsiveness and aloofness may have had as much to do with the defeat as the demographics. As a result of the defeat, the school board sponsored a public forum. About 100 people crowded the school cafeteria, most of them casually dressed. Unlike the formal school board meetings, the school board chairman set a confrontational tone from the outset, admonishing against rude comments and reminding the audience that inappropriate comments would not be answered.

The superintendent explained there was already a $350,000 deficit left over from the previous year, and with no additional funding to cover it, drastic cuts would be made. When the board chairman announced he would not cut school bus routes, there were several gasps in the audience. Before the levy, the board had promised the residents on the most vulnerable, least-used, farthest-out rural routes they would stay open for a year.

One resident got up without being recognized and said, "You're not serious, are you? (about cutting costs). Now you have to cut. Do it." Another resident said the move to keep the rural routes open showed that "everything is the same" even after the levy had failed. "You have to cut it (bus service)."

Another resident, upon hearing that her child's field trip for the next week was being canceled, said the board was going to "stick it to" the students in retaliation for their parents' votes.

Another of the parents said the superintendent appeared superior when, upon his promotion, he rearranged and redecorated offices at the taxpayers' expense. "It might be small, but it gave the wrong impression. It was poor policy," he said.

The school officials were concerned about elitism in the proposed pay-to-play requirement for student athletes. Under that program, students would have to pay for equipment, transportation, and insurance in order to participate in sports. One school board member was concerned that only students with comparatively wealthy parents could then participate, especially in sports like football, where the costs could be several hundred dollars per student. The student council president and the athletic director both spoke out against the program, and no one spoke in favor of it. However, the board voted unanimously to consider it.[65]

During the hearing, the two reporters covering the session (the county reporter from City One and the education reporter from City Three), sat in the front row, closer to the school officials they knew than the residents they did not know. When the parent accused the school officials of taking out their anger on the referendum result by cutting her child's field trip, the City Three reporter said quietly, "if you didn't like the results, you should have voted for the referendum."

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[65] The pay-to-play program was instituted in the fall.

The next day's article in the City Three newspaper did not include the complaint of the woman concerning her child's field trip, nor the comment about redecorating the offices. Both newspapers led with the pay-to-play issue and the deferment of the bus route cuts. The other cuts, trips and extracurricular activities, were listed, but the anti-school board comments were not reported. Again, the school board looked unified and noble in the face of defeat.

As the meeting broke up, the school officials answered some questions of residents and reporters individually. Most expressed surprise at the criticisms. The superintendent said to the researcher following the forum that "we have not done enough" to involve parents in the decision-making process and the experience of the tax levy would make him look at more ways to make them feel more a part of the policy-making process.

The levy illustrates the dangers for officials and the press if they rely on the culture of support. By failing to reach out to opponents of the levy, the school officials were unable to evaluate the size or nature of the opposition and were therefore blindsided by the opposition. The officials were also unable to tailor their presentations to anticipate and answer the questions of the opponents.

The problems with the levy were the result of the entire system rather than any individual factor. In City One, there was the Communications Council for teachers to air complaints to the superintendent. In City Two, the public forum portion of the meetings might have allowed some dissenting opinions to be expressed. There were no such opportunities in City Three. The meetings were structured to build support, not invite alternatives. Members of the public were invited to make and observe positive presentations rather than to participate in open discussions. Unlike the other cities, in which the superintendents and other officials tried to squelch alternative opinions before they had a chance to be aired, there were no alternative voices to be silenced in City Three during the study period. Nobody confronted the school officials with problems, complaints or alternative ideas. Yet, the result of the school levy demonstrated there were alternative, dissenting voices who were dissatisfied with school policies.

The press rituals are also structured to discourage alternative voices. The reporter for the City Three newspaper was hampered because he worked in the production department as wells as in the news department. He did not have the time to seek out levy opponents, nor was he inclined to do so. After all, the superintendent sent out material, fostered story ideas, and was available for questions and commentary before and after meetings and other events. The reporter was able to file stories with less effort than if he had reached out to alternative sources or made efforts to solicit ideas from those sources. Since the tendency toward the culture of support predated both the superintendent's and the reporter's involvement in school board politics, and since such rituals are learned, according to Tuchman, there was no incentive for either to try to find new sources and ideas. Even with the time constraints because of the reporter's dual jobs, the reporter said he would rather have given fuller explanations of the superintendent's programs than to find alternative or critical viewpoints. Since he was trained to rely on official sources without question, there was no reason for him to believe that there was anything wrong with the practices in which he was engaged.

The official sources, primarily the superintendent, and the press worked in a closed system in which the newspaper served as a public relations vehicle for the school system rather than as a forum for various viewpoints on school issues.

While this system might be comfortable for the participants, it is deeply flawed.

DISCUSSION

In each city, the dynamics of the press-source relationship were unique. However, in each case the effect was the same: the superintendent of schools set the agenda not only for the school system but for the local newspaper coverage of the schools. The agenda presented to the readers on school issues was his. Local readers in each city read, for the most part, the superintendent's perspectives on school issues. The superintendent decided what was important, and the reporters followed and reported his decisions without question.

The research question of who sets whose agenda was answered and demonstrated clearly through both the content analysis and the ethnographic descriptions.

Stories generated by members of the public, teachers, or students were conspicuously absent from all the newspapers. That absence is another indicator of the power of the agenda-setting function of the superintendents and other officials. The only alternative or unofficial sources mentioned at all, including critical ones, appeared at forums sponsored by officials. Thus, the officials were better able to diminish any impact of alternative viewpoints if they wished to do so, especially since there were no occasions during the study period in which the officials were not the last persons consulted by the reporters. The officials always had the last word.

As in the Kanervos' studies of town and city administrators, the superintendents actively pursued agendas. In each city, the superintendent actively called the reporters with story ideas or sent out press releases in order to present his agenda in the newspaper. Also, the press practices fostered the active agenda setting by their passivity.

Even in the meeting coverage, of which there were 24 stories, or 34 percent, the superintendents or the PR manager actively set the agendas of the reporters by orchestrating the meetings. In each city, the superintendent admitted to trying to eliminate possible conflicts before the meetings. Superintendents or other officials supplied materials: budgets, written agendas, and assorted background information. In City Two, the PR manager sat next to the local reporter and coached her during the meetings, telling her what was important and what was not.

Those efforts to set the agenda were quite effective, according to the content analysis. There were 18 stories where no source was mentioned. In each of these, the actual sources were either the superintendent of schools, who was reached by a phone call, or the City Two PR manager. The stories from the PR manager, 14 of the 18 sourceless stories, were printed almost verbatim. Since he was given access to the newsroom and the newspaper layout/production area, he was also able to ensure the stories would go in as he saw fit. Even though the reporters and editors said he was there to ensure accuracy, accuracy in this case also meant the stories were printed as he

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wished, without question. Since the PR manager was not mentioned in the stories, readers may have believed newspaper staffers attended the events covered, talked to the individuals mentioned, or at least telephoned and asked questions concerning the subjects of the stories. In fact, the stories portrayed the public relations manager's unadulterated view of these events and activities.

The other four sourceless stories were generated by phone calls to the superintendent. Two were meeting follow-ups concerning City Three published in the City One newspaper. Since the superintendent was not mentioned as a source, audience members might easily assume the reporter attended the meeting and made informed judgments of what was newsworthy and what was not. Instead, the newspaper relayed the superintendent's view of events without the reader knowing this.

Many journalists avoid sourceless stories because they are concerned that if a story has no attribution to an independent source, the story will appear to the reader to be more opinion than fact. The two sourceless City Three newspaper stories publicizing the meetings on the tax levy may have run that risk. Since these promoted an event sponsored by the school board rather than coming as the result of it, the reader might have assumed the stories were connected to the newspaper's pro-tax-levy editorial stand.

Since this project did not focus on reader reactions, further research may examine the question of how readers respond to sourceless stories.

Of the stories with one or more sources, superintendents were mentioned 60 times out of 115 sources in the aggregate. However, since other stories promoting programs or events in schools were generated by the superintendents or the PR director, many of those sources were also representing the total picture that the superintendents wanted to project. So it is clear that a wide majority of the sources mentioned in the stories were representing the "official" view of the school system, building an overall positive agenda of the school system presented to the public.[66]

The active agenda setting by the superintendents was matched by the passivity of the reporters and editors covering the school systems. In each city, the superintendent was the first person, and very often the last person, consulted for information on school stories, as well as for story ideas. School board members were sometimes used as sources for background information, but they were only mentioned in stories when they spoke at meetings. They did not seek out members of the press, nor did any other school officials in any of the three cities during the study period. No reporter or editor mentioned the need to seek out alternative sources in any city. Even when other sources surfaced, as with the disgruntled stepparent in City Two, no effort was made to contact them beyond their public statements. However, the reporter did discuss the stepparent issue with the superintendent after the incidents in order to obtain his insight into the matter; she did not contact the stepparent. In City Three, the reporter and editor made no attempt to contact any of the school levy opponents, and opponents were only quoted in a story when they attended a meeting the day after the vote, thus proving such sources were available.

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[66] The exact number of sources under the control of the superintendent and the nature of that control is beyond the scope of this project. It was impossible to determine, for example, the motivation of each speaker at a meeting.

The absence of non-official sources enhances the dominance of the superintendents' view of the school system. Without alternative agendas presented to the public, such as agendas with items concerning severely behaviorally challenged students in City One, school bus safety or access to step-children in City Two, or levy opponents in City Three, the overall agenda presented to the public was that of the superintendent of schools.

While the overwhelming presence of the superintendents in the school stories reflects the control of the agenda, the nature of their presence and that of other school officials also makes them [illegible]ore unified and therefore more competent than they may be in reality. As Paletz, Reichert, and McIntyre pointed out, underreporting conflicts, which they called establishing "psychological distance," made school officials look more professional and trustworthy than they may have been.

In the aggregate, out of three cities over two months, fewer than half of the conflicts that occurred in public were reported. The nature of the disagreements varied from city to city and newspaper to newspaper. Fewer than a third of the conflicts, three of 10, were reported in City Two, two of three in City One, and four of seven in City Three were reported. Despite the variation, they were still underreported by each newspaper. Given the small sample size and the low number of actual conflicts in Cities One and Three, further research is necessary to see if this phenomenon is significant.

On the question of whether or not the mobilization model of agenda setting is in effect, the answer is a resounding "no."

In each city, the agenda on school issues carried in the newspaper was essentially the superintendent's. He formed the agenda with some input from school administrators and board members, but the public was absent from the policy formation process.

In all three cities, the superintendents squelched or discouraged criticisms, complaints, and issues privately, before they reached the point where they could be presented to the public. Even when issues arose at public forums, they came in spite of these efforts, rather than as the result of encouragement to contribute to the policy-making discourse. In City One, the superintendent actively discouraged public revelation of problems of children with behavioral difficulties and was displeased when a complaint about a graduation speaker was expressed in public. In City Two, the superintendent and other school officials tried to discourage a stepparent from addressing the issue of access to his stepson.

In City Three, no active efforts arose to discourage complaints toward the superintendent and other officials. However, there was no effort, either, to encourage residents from opposing viewpoints on the mill levy to express their reservations to school officials. Such an outreach could have helped the school officials tailor their presentations to make their budget requests more palatable to the voters. Instead, they appeared arrogant. Some voters seemed to vote against the levy because they were angered at the perceived arrogance of the officials rather than by the merits of the levy.

In addition to the active agenda setting by the superintendents and the acquiescence of the press, all participants in the project had to address the "culture of support." The culture, which dominates the school board in all three cities, assumes that the superintendents and other administrators, hired and trained as professionals, need little public feedback in order to make proper decisions. The culture assumes that the officials who are empowered to make decisions have superior skills and knowledge to the clients of the system, such as parents, students, and in some instances, teachers. The input from these other non-official sources is therefore devalued and discouraged.

This central assumption divides the culture into insiders and outsiders. Insiders support the idea of superior knowledge and skill of the superintendents or other officials. They tend to be more involved in activities such as the PTA or civic or business organizations aligned with the schools. As in City Three, where members of the privately based school foundation were also involved in campaigning for the school levy, the roles of these insiders and supporters overlapped. These activities provided more opportunity for informal contact with officials than the outsiders enjoyed. Informal and formal contact led to more access on policy-making matters. Though there was no evidence of these insiders contributing to the policy-making process during the study period, these would be the people who would have the opportunity to do so, rather than the outsiders.

The insiders generally included school board members and administrators, as well as some teachers and most leaders of parent and private organizations connected to school activities. Although dissident school board members and administrators in some cases may very well be outsiders, none surfaced during the study period.

Outsiders included dissident teachers, such as the City One critic and the members of the Communications Council, parents who disagreed with school policies and other, less identifiable, individuals or groups.

The insiders were invited to public forums to present awards or to discuss the achievements of their activities. They and their activities were promoted in the media in press releases.

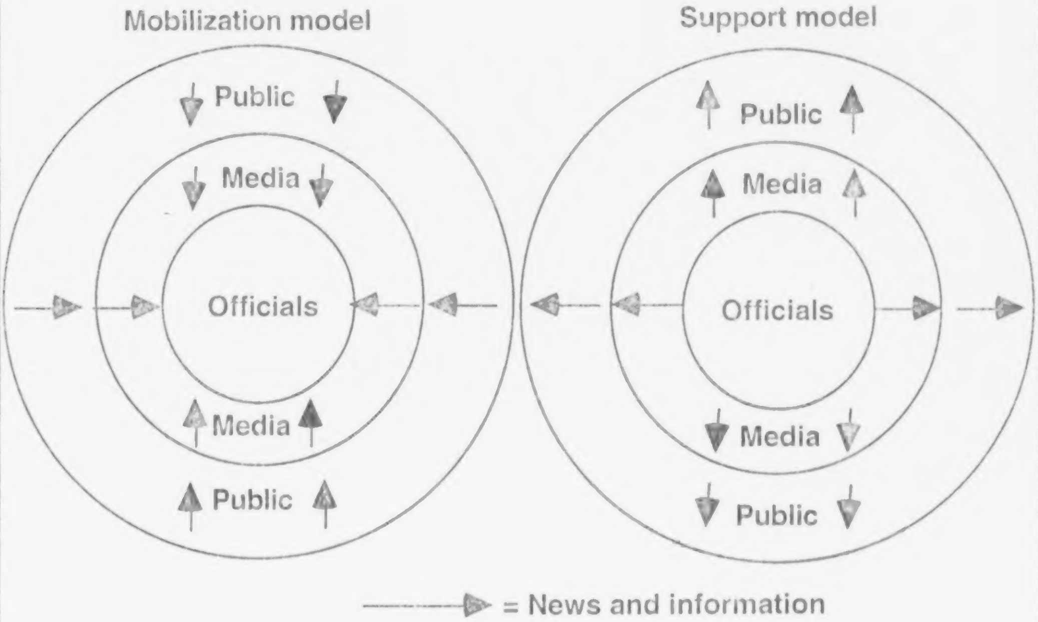
As the City Two PR manager said in his job description, the purpose of all communication to the press is to promote the initiatives of the school system, or to promote its agenda, which comes from the superintendent and is supported by the insiders. In order to promote the agenda effectively, members of the press are enthusiastically courted to become insiders, and they just as enthusiastically accept the invitation.

By formally and informally supporting the agenda of the insiders, the reporters in the study gained access to school officials. If a reporter was, as the City One superintendent said, just short of "being in (the insiders') pocket," the superintendent would be more likely to call the reporter when he wanted to promote a program or policy, and he would be more likely to return the reporter's calls.

Such a relationship is practical for the newspaper from a production standpoint. It is quite symbiotic. When a question about school arises, the newspaper can expect it to be answered in as timely a fashion as possible. Story ideas and copy are easier to find and generate. When time is at a premium and there is space to fill, as in City Three where the reporter had to also work as a production assistant, an insider is more likely to find information to fill that space than an outsider. It also ensures the agenda of the insiders is the agenda presented to the public in the press.

The reporters in all three newspapers said their jobs were to present accurate information. There is no reason to believe information provided in the culture of support from the superintendents or others is any less accurate than information from any other official source. Since the culture assumes that the officials are the most knowledgeable sources, there is less reason to seek out alternative sources or viewpoints than if the reporters operated under another, more critical, paradigm. Such assumptions may lead to missing stories such as guns or behavioral problems in the City One schools. Without publicizing such issues, and leaving the community uninformed, there is no chance for the public to pressure school officials to address these issues. The mobilization model does not have a chance to work.

Fig. 7.1 The Mobilization Model and the Support Model



In the accepted mobilization model, news and information flow from independent sources and members of the public to the media, which then pressure officials to take action and make policy. In the support model, officials promulgate actions and policies, supply them to the media, which then passes them on to a passive public. The school boards in Ohio under study exemplefy the support model.

The insider-outsider nature of the culture of support discourages potential alternative sources from seeking out the press. Outsiders, perceiving the press as insiders, are less likely to come to the press with the problems that could start the mobilization model. For example, the teachers of the Communications Council in City One were aware of problems in the school but did not even attempt to go to the press with them, believing the newspaper insiders would not listen. Whether the newspaper reporters and editors would listen or not is almost irrelevant. They never had a chance to determine whether or not to do a story about guns in the schools or disruptive mainstreamed behaviorally handicapped students. With dissent from the culture of support discouraged in a passive fashion and with assent actively encouraged by the superintendents and other officials, the culture of support is self-perpetuating.

The newspaper reporters, as insiders participating in the culture of support, are less likely to seek out outsiders because of concerns of accuracy and bias. The City One reporter covering the school board said she preferred not to seek out the City One critic because the critic was biased against the insiders, and her information, therefore, was, at the very least, slanted. The City Two reporter covering the school system saw no need to talk to the stepparent with the complaint or any other parents who appeared at open forums, because she believed her information from the superintendent or the PR manager was accurate and unbiased. She believed the parents' point of view was more one-sided.

The insider-outsider nature of the culture may also sharpen existing divisions in social class. The City Two superintendent admitted he had problems communicating across such class divisions, and as in the case of the City One Communications Council teachers, people of different social classes tend to feel their issues will not be addressed fairly. The stepparent who made the complaint in City Two assumed he would be treated unfairly when he entered the school and precipitated an argument, the superintendent said. The stepparent refused to talk to the researcher, citing the researcher's "insider" manner of dress, in a jacket and tie.

While this one incident is anecdotal, it may well reflect attitudes of other members of City One and other communities. Opponents of the City Three tax levy, following the defeat, also expressed concerns that school officials were aloof and did not take the dissenters' concerns seriously. Although the opponents who spoke did not choose to reveal their occupations or educations, they were not dressed as formally as the officials. This may indicate class divisions as well, but that is beyond the scope of this project.

The heavy reliance on the official sources and the exclusion of alternative sources directly contradicts the mobilization model. As in the Chicago studies of a decade earlier, the official sources of the newspaper formulate their information, their agenda items, in a closed system composed of insiders. These agenda items are then passed on to the press fully formed. The press is trusted as a member of the insider group to carry the agenda if not to help formulate it. Members of the press, in this case newspaper reporters and editors, pass on the agendas of the officials without question. The outsiders, members of the public or officials with criticisms, are discouraged and excluded from the policy-making process. They do not have the opportunity to take their place in the mobilization model. Rather, they work in a "support model." In the support model, information flows from the officials and is carried by the media to the public. In the mobilization model, the public comes to the media, which investigates the problem, then publishes or broadcasts the results. This leads to action and policy making by the officials.

While the support model has been suggested by previous research, it has not been formally introduced. It underlies the Northwestern studies of work done on investigative reports as well as this project. Of course, three small cities in Ohio, their school boards, and their local newspapers do not necessarily reflect every relationship between official sources and the media. However, the Northwestern studies found the support model working in large cities with investigative reports on various issues in assorted media while this project found similar results in an entirely different routine setting: school boards and newspapers in northwest Ohio.

The original methodology for this study, the combination of the qualitative ethnographic approaches and the quantitative content analysis, would also lend itself to similar settings, other studies, and different phenomena as well. Too often, content analysis alone demonstrates and interprets how things appear in the media, yet it makes no attempt to answer why that occurs or provides perspective on those occurrences. The ethnographic approach provides reasons for the phenomena demonstrated by the content analysis and offers directions for further studies, both qualitative and quantitative.

This study, for example, raises the questions of to what extent the culture of support is affected, if at all, by social class. The study came up with mixed results in that area. Some outsiders, such as dissident teachers in City One, appear to be of the same socioeconomic class as the insiders. Other outsiders may be less educated or of a lower socioeconomic status than the insiders. The elusive nature of outsiders, such as the opponents to the City Three tax levy, who were difficult to identify because of their lack of organization, or the angry stepparent in City Two, who refused to answer questions, makes this question difficult to study.

While all insiders were white and college-educated, as were the journalists who covered them, the small sample size makes it difficult to generalize demographic information concerning them. Many, for example, refused to provide information about incomes.

The relationship between insider status and gender also warrants further study. While there seemed to be an even split between men and women among the insiders, all the superintendents, the ones who truly were the agenda setters, were men. Among the journalists, only one of the five reporters who wrote about the school boards under study was male. Again, however, the small sample size makes it difficult to make any generalizations about either of these observations.

While the insiders were about evenly divided among men and women, there were no active African-American or Hispanic participants in the study. The one African-American administrator, a principal in City Two, was not the subject of any articles during the study period, nor did she have any contact with the reporters. City Three's population was about 10 percent Hispanic, and there was a non-functioning, though official, minority advisory board. The chairman of that board was an African-American. No Hispanic teachers or students appeared at any public forum nor were they represented among teachers, school board members, or administrators during the study period. No Hispanic participated in any policy formation or opposition. In the other cities, the minority population was less than five percent for any one group.

Some of the dynamics of advisory panels, such as boards of education, and their relationships to the officials they supervise, such as superintendents, is also worth some scrutiny. In all three cities, the superintendent was by far the most active policy maker, and the boards acted largely in an oversight capacity. No policies or initiatives or programs proposed or supported by superintendents were opposed by the school boards during the study period. No policies or initiatives were proposed by school board members at all.

The dominance of the superintendent is reflected in the school coverage. School board members may speak at public forums, but the public face of the school system, in the press or at a public appearance, was the superintendent. Seldom were school board members quoted in the newspapers and they were even less often sought out by members of the press as sources. At no time during the study period did a school board member contact a reporter or did a reporter contact a school board member in any of the three cities.

The tendency for reporters to rely on a very limited number of sources, even among the [illegible]ters, may well limit the possible policy or agenda items offered to the public. Other research suggests this reliance on a limited number of sources occurs in other media in other settings as well. The pervasive nature of the tendency to rely on limited sources may warrant further, larger-scale studies.

Whether or not the dominance of the superintendent in media coverage is related to district size, geography, or is just peculiar to these schools is beyond the scope of this study. Some officials may be more or less active agenda setters depending on a wide variety of variables as well. Nevertheless, three very different men in three different cities, with three different school systems, colleagues, school boards, and newspapers and three very different personalities all ended up as the single dominant and unchallenged sources of information about their school systems on policy matters. This raises the valid question that a larger sample size and perhaps a more narrowly focused study will yield similar results.

While the agenda presented to the public in the local newspapers might be controlled by the superintendent, this project also illustrates Cohen's statement that the press may be effective in telling the public what to think about, but not necessarily effective in telling the public about what to think. The City Three newspaper supported the tax levy implicitly by promoting workshops and only mentioning pro-levy sources in its stories prior to the vote. It explicitly supported it in an editorial. Despite the support of the press, the initiative still failed.

The question of who sets the agendas of the agenda setters is a wide and complicated one. In these three case studies, however, the agenda was set by the superintendent of schools.

CONCLUSION

The active agenda setting by the superintendents, coupled with the passive press practices, allowed the officials to control school coverage in all three cities under study. Since opposition, alternative ideas, and criticisms were discouraged or suppressed, the newspapers carried the superintendent's version of scholastic reality or agenda.

The content analysis demonstrated heavy reliance on the superintendents as sources, and the ethnographic approach demonstrated their deep and extensive influence on the overall process, as well as the results in the newspaper stories. That reliance, coupled with the complete absence of parents, teachers, or community members for story ideas, gave the superintendents control of the agenda presented to the public in the media.

By using three case studies, validity was enhanced. In each city, the structures and interpersonal dynamics were unique, yet they yielded similar results in the newspaper stories: the superintendent controlled the content. If three cities yielded similar results, it is reasonable to expect similar results in similar settings, especially since similar results were found in the Northwestern studies in urban settings with larger, more diverse media.

This project identifies some of the problems with the culture of support fostered by the dominance of the superintendent or other officials. Class tensions may be exacerbated, and alternative ideas and approaches to problems may not be given a chance to be applied. Problems may be [illegible] as they were in City One.

The tax levy vote in City Three was serendipitous to this project. It illustrated a problem with the culture of support. The continued exclusion of alternative voices from the process kept opponents of the levy out of contact with the school. The local newspaper also failed to identify alternative voices. Thus, the superintendent and other officials were blindsided by the results of the levy vote. If the school officials and the newspaper had adopted a more inclusionary approach to their communications, and if the newspaper had identified anti-levy opinion leaders, school officials could have tailored their presentations to better meet the needs of the voters. This is obviously speculative, but further research may shed more light on that issue.

While the support model certainly and strongly emerged in all three cities and newspapers, it is premature to pronounce the death of the mobilization model. Citizens may well come to the local media with story ideas or tips that yield to investigations that bring pressure to bear on policy makers. The nature of the individual media outlet and the journalists, and the nature of the community and the politicians certainly would affect the effectiveness of the mobilization model.

However, since the support model seems to assert itself in various instances, and in these cases very strongly, it would be a mistake to assume the mobilization model as a dominant paradigm. It may be time to re-think assumptions about who sets whose agenda.

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Running head: IMPACT OF QUESTION ORDER ON THE THIRD-PERSON EFFECT

Impact of Question Order on the Third-Person Effect

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Abstract

A nationwide telephone survey was conducted to investigate the impact of question order on the perceptual and behavioral hypotheses of the third-person effect. Key questions included estimated effects of media issues on self, perceived effects on others, and support for restrictions on the media. Four question-order conditions (restrictions-others-self, restrictions-self-others, others-self-restrictions, self-others-restrictions) were tested with three issues (television violence, televised trials, and negative political advertising). In line with past research, the order of the self, others, and restrictions questions did not affect the perceptual hypothesis. However, the sequencing of the self, others, and restrictions questions affected support for the behavioral hypothesis in some conditions. The results suggest that, consistent with a saliency effect, placement of self and others questions prior to the restrictions question might heighten respondents' willingness to endorse restrictions on the media and increase support for the behavioral hypothesis.

Impact of Question Order on the Third-Person Effect

The third-person effect, conceived by sociologist W. Phillips Davison (1983) as an intriguing observation, has developed into a fertile line of communication and public opinion research. The effect hypothesizes that (1) people exposed to persuasive mass media messages will perceive these messages to wield greater influence on people other than themselves (the perceptual hypothesis, which goes by such names as third-person perception, perceptual bias, and self-others discrepancy); and (2) people who exhibit third-person perception will be more likely to support restrictions on these media messages (the behavioral hypothesis) (e.g., McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997; Rojas, Shah, & Faber, 1996; Salwen, 1998). The perceptual hypothesis has received considerable empirical support. For instance, Perloff (1996) recently reported that 15 of 16 studies were consistent with this hypothesis (see also Lasorsa, 1992; Paul, Salwen, & Dupagne, 1999; Perloff, 1993). On the other hand, the few but growing number of studies that tested the behavioral hypothesis yielded mixed or qualified support (Gunther, 1995; Lee & Yang, 1996; McLeod et al., 1997; Rojas et al., 1996; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990; Salwen, 1998; Shah, Faber, & Youn, 1999).

Methodologically, typical third-person effect studies have respondents estimate the impact of at least one media message on themselves (i.e., self effects) and their perceptions of the message's impact on other people (i.e., others effects). Question order is a concern in all research (e.g., Bradburn, 1983; Converse & Presser, 1986; Schuman & Presser, 1981), but it is a special concern in third-person effect studies because respondents are asked to directly compare the effects of media messages on themselves to those on other people (Price & Tewksbury, 1996). Researchers have long recognized that in making self-others comparisons people might characterize their responses in a self-serving manner so that they appear smarter and less susceptible to harmful media effects than other people (Brown, 1986; Glynn, Ostman, & McDonald, 1995; Gunther, 1991; Lasorsa, 1989; Perloff, 1993). It is therefore apparent that the order of the self and others effects questions might affect the outcome. Some researchers have suggested that this comparative process is guided by a self-serving bias, whereby people are motivated to make downward comparisons of others to enhance their self-esteem (David & Johnson, 1998; Gunther, 1991; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990).

In one of the early third-person effect studies, Lasorsa (1989) argued that back-to-back self-then-others questions could lead to an underestimation of third-person perception by encouraging respondents to move "the answer to the second question closer to that of the first" (p. 377; see also Lasorsa, 1992). Conversely, the others-then-self question order could artificially increase the third-person gap if respondents systematically use the others question as a baseline for answering the self question. In the survey research literature, this type of order effect is known as the "consistency" (Bradburn, 1983; Bradburn & Mason, 1964) or "carryover" effect (Tourangeau, Rasinski, Bradburn, & D'Andrade, 1989). David and Johnson (1998) suggested that this phenomenon may occur because respondents cognitively assign a high rating (or anchor) to the others question, as a result of a general perception of greater media effects on others, and then mark down the media effect on self. They referred to this process as an anchoring bias.

A number of researchers have acknowledged the question-order problem and attempted to address it by alternating the self and others questions (David & Johnson, 1998; Gunther, 1995; Mason, 1995; Park, 1997; Price, Tewksbury, & Huang, 1998; Salwen 1998; Salwen & Driscoll, 1997; Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice, & Rosenfeld, 1991). With the exception of David and

Johnson (1998),[1] these researchers reported no significant question-order effects on third-person perception. Brosius and Engel (1996) went so far as to flatly state that "Methodological artifacts due to question order can therefore be excluded" (p. 144). But Price and Tewksbury (1996) recognized that reversing the self and others effects questions only partly resolved the methodological concerns associated with question order in third-person effect studies. They argued that possible question-contrast effects (i.e., the self-serving comparisons that people make when they contrast themselves to others) could not be addressed by reversing the sequence of the questions. In addition to designing self-then-others and others-then-self conditions, Price and Tewksbury also included self-only and others-only conditions in experimental studies where respondents were not asked to contrast media effects on them to those on other people. After testing a series of issues in two experiments and finding no consistent differences, they declared third-person perception to be "a robust observation, occurring in every measurement condition and in response to four different stimuli" (p. 137).

In recent years, more researchers have stressed the importance of testing the behavioral hypothesis (Gunther, 1995; Lee & Yang, 1996; McLeod et al., 1997; Rojas et al., 1996; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990; Salwen, 1998; Shah et al., 1999). McLeod et al. (1997) claimed that the perceptual hypothesis "becomes more meaningful if it is linked with real-world consequences as hypothesized by Davison" (p. 154). Studies that include a behavioral component typically incorporate a measure of support for message restrictions. For example, respondents might be asked about their support for the creation of an oversight body to restrict unfair or misleading campaign messages (Rucinski & Salmon, 1990; Salwen, 1998). Despite growing scholarly interest in the behavioral hypothesis, research has not yet addressed the impact of question order when third-person effect studies involve both self-others questions *and* a behavioral question. In this situation, the issue of question-order becomes more complicated as researchers who previously had to deal with the sequencing of two central concepts (i.e., self effects and others effects) now have to consider a third behavioral evaluation. As Salwen (1997) noted, the placement of the behavioral question in a third-person effect study poses methodological challenges:

> It may be that in responding to the self and others effects questions, respondents pause and reflect on questions concerning media influence in society and on the particular issues under study. This self-reflection about media influence may affect respondents' behavioral intentions about the issues. If so, this can have consequences for the behavioral component of the third-person effect, and it underscores the need for methodological studies that examine the placement of the behavioral questions before and after administering the sets of self and others questions in study designs. (p. 28)

This study investigated whether the sequencing of the self, others, and restrictions questions affects the perceptual and behavioral outcomes of the third-person effect. Absence of question-order effects in this study would strengthen the overall robustness of the perceptual and behavioral hypotheses. The presence of question-order effects, however, would warn of the need to test for question-order effects in third-person effect studies.

Method

A telephone survey was conducted with a random sample of 721 adults in the continental United States during the weekday evenings from March 31 to April 11, 1997.[2] There were up to five callbacks. Calls were made from a central location at a university research facility. Excluding ineligibles, faxes, and nonworking numbers, the response rate was 58%.

To increase the reliability of the findings through repeated tests, we used multiple issues in this study (see Price & Tewksbury, 1996). Each respondent was randomly assigned to evaluate one of three issues: television violence *(n* = 236), televised trials (*n* = 244), or negative political advertising (*n* = 241). The issues were selected based on the pretest below and assessments by the authors. Within the issue conditions, each respondent was randomly assigned to one of four question-order variations: restrictions-others-self (*n* = 182), restrictions-self-others (*n* = 181), others-self-restrictions (*n* = 181), or self-others-restrictions (*n* = 177). Therefore, there were a total of 12 conditions in this study.

With regard to third-person perception (i.e., the others-minus-self difference), the survey assessed two dimensions of media effects: power and immorality. In February 1997, a pretest was conducted with 165 undergraduate students to develop reliable third-person effects scales. The six pretest issues were: televised trials, X-rated videos, press coverage of war, negative political advertising, hate speech parades, and violent and misogynic music lyrics. Factor analyses using varimax rotation yielded two four-item dimensions: power effects of the media (persuasive, powerful, significant, and strong) and immoral effects of the media (corrupting, immoral, indecent, and vulgar). Cronbach's *alphas* ranged from .78 to .89 for the power effects on others and from .72 to .93 for the power effects on themselves. Cronbach's *alphas* ranged from .71 to .85 for the immoral effects on others and from .75 to .86 for the immoral effects on themselves.

Based on these pretest data, scales of media power (powerful, persuasive, significant, and strong) and immoral (immoral, indecent, vulgar, and corrupting) effects on self and on others were constructed. The scales ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 meant *not at all [adjective]* on [you/others] and 5 meant *very [adjective]* on [you/others] (see Appendix for question wording). Paired *t* tests between responses to self and others questions were used to test the perceptual hypothesis.

To measure support for media restrictions, respondents were asked to report their endorsement for government restrictions on the three issues (see Appendix). This restrictions measure, based on a variation of a similar index used by Rucinski and Salmon (1990), appraised legal restrictions to overcome the undesirability associated with expressing support for censorship. Consistent with the third-person effect literature, the behavioral hypothesis was tested by correlating the support for restrictions measure with third-person perception.

Results

Question Order and Means of Self, Others, and Restrictions

A series of one-way analyses of variance were conducted to identify significant differences in mean scores of self, others, and restrictions measures across question-order conditions by issue and effect (Table 1). Only the means of the self question for the power ($F(3, 228) = 3.15, p < .05$) and immoral ($F(3, 227) = 4.94, p < .01$) effect scales in the television violence issue were significantly different from one another. The Scheffé *post-hoc* test uncovered a significant mean difference in self responses for immoral effects between the restrictions-others-self condition and the restrictions-self-others condition, as well as between the restrictions-self-others condition and the others-self-restrictions condition (Table 1). There were no significant differences in support for restrictions scores among the four question-order conditions for all three issues. The two-way ANOVAs revealed no significant interactions between question order and issue on the self, others, and restrictions measures for both power and immoral scales.

Question Order and Third-Person Perception Scores

The one-way ANOVAs also indicated no significant differences in third-person perception scores (i.e., obtained by subtracting the mean scores of others from those of self) among the four question-order conditions for the televised trials issue (Table 2). But both F values of the power ($F(3, 225) = 2.97$, $p < .05$) and immoral effects ($F(3, 224) = 4.69$, $p < .01$) for television violence were statistically significant, indicating that the size of the third-person perception gap varies significantly across question-order conditions for this issue. In the case of immoral effects, respondents in the restrictions-self-others ($M = 0.72$, $SD = 1.28$) and self-others-restrictions ($M = 0.74$, $SD = 1.40$) conditions had a significantly lower third-person perception gap than those in the others-self-restrictions condition ($M = 1.42$, $SD = 1.28$) . In the case of power effects, however, the Scheffé test yielded no significant differences among mean values. As for negative political advertising, the F value of immoral effects was statistically significant, $F(3, 220) = 2.81$, $p < .05$, but again the Scheffé results were insignificant. There were no significant interactions between question order and issue on third-person perception for both power and immoral scales.

Question Order and Perceptual Hypothesis

From a theoretical point of view, the most important aspect of this study remains whether question order affects *support* for the third-person effect. The answer was clearly negative for the perceptual hypothesis across all three issues (Table 3). With the exception of immoral effects for the negative political advertising issue in the restrictions-self-others condition, all paired t tests between self and others mean scores were statistically significant at $p < .05$, indicating support for the perceptual hypothesis across question-order conditions.

Question Order and Behavioral Hypothesis

But the results were more ambiguous when we examined the impact of question order on support for the behavioral hypothesis (Table 4). Eighteen of the 24 correlation coefficients were statistically insignificant, indicating a lack of support for the behavioral hypothesis.[3] Explained variance in the restrictions measure by third-person perception ranged from 0.04% to 18%. For television violence, three (restrictions-others-self, restrictions-self-others, others-self-restrictions) of the four conditions yielded nonsignificant correlations between support for restrictions and power or immoral effect perceptions. Only the self-others-restrictions condition for television violence produced significant correlations for both power and immoral effects. For televised trials, correlations were insignificant in the restrictions-self-others and self-others-restrictions conditions but significant in the restrictions-others-self and others-self-restrictions conditions. For negative political advertising, all correlation coefficients were insignificant except for power effects in the others-self-restrictions condition.[4]

However, when we tested for significant differences between all 36 paired correlations,[5] we found that only two pairs, restrictions-others-self with self-others-restrictions ($Z = -2.19, p < .05$) and others-self-restrictions with others-self-restrictions ($Z = -2.11, p < .05$) in the television violence condition, were significantly different from one another. To provide a clearer picture of the question-order variations, we collapsed the four conditions into two conditions (restrictions first and restrictions last). Although four correlation coefficients were statistically significant, indicating support for the behavioral hypothesis, we found no significant differences between the six pairs (Table 5).

Discussion

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Price & Tewksbury, 1996), this study confirmed the robustness of the perceptual third-person effect across issues. Alternating the order of perceptual and behavioral questions did not affect support for third-person perception.

But the results concerning the behavioral hypothesis were much less clear-cut: Respondents in some question-order conditions were more likely to endorse restrictions on media messages than in other conditions. Initially, these results revealed several significant correlation coefficients, but not a systematic pattern. When we collapsed the four question-order conditions into restrictions first and last conditions, the findings then suggested that the positioning of the restrictions measure affected support for the behavioral hypothesis. Four of the six correlations in the restrictions last condition were significant.

Why would asking the restrictions question *after* the self and others questions result in greater support for the behavioral hypothesis? One explanation lies in the saliency effect (Bradburn & Mason, 1964). Drawing attention to a controversial or undesirable message, by asking perception questions on self and others, could increase respondents' likelihood to support message restrictions. Respondents have more time to ponder issues before asserting their position on the restrictions question and have given thought to the potential "effect" of the communication on them and on others. This interpretation is consistent with the results of Schwarz and Hippler (1995), who alternated attitudinal and behavioral questions. They found that German respondents reported a higher level of donation "for the suffering population of Russia" (p. 97) when this intended behavior question preceded attitudinal questions about taxation and welfare spending in Germany than when it was asked after the attitudinal questions.

The behavioral hypothesis results also underscored the fact that not all media effects are equal and might lead to different outcomes when subjected to question-order variations. It is clear from Table 5 that the power dimension of third-person perception was a significantly better predictor of restrictions than the immoral dimension for televised trials and negative political advertising. In hindsight, this finding is not surprising because television violence has the clearest moral dimension, while televised trials and negative political advertising are issues involving news and public affairs topics reported by the media; hence the greater relevance of the power dimension for these issues.

We should note that this study did not examine whether placement of the restrictions question *between* the self and others questions affects third-person effect outcomes. This additional permutation is an area for future research. Perhaps placing the restrictions question as a buffer item between the self and others questions or separating the self-others questions from the restrictions question with unrelated buffer questions might alleviate or reduce the question-order effects on the behavioral hypothesis we observed in this study. Bishop, Oldendick, and Tuchfarber (1984) found that question-order effects cannot eliminated or minimized by simply interposing a series of questions on unrelated topics between the questions about the respondent's representative and the question about the respondent's interest in government and public affairs (see also Bishop, 1987). On the other hand, Schwartz and Schuman (1997), replicating the Bishop studies, found that introducing a single related buffer item (about the representative's public relations work) did greatly reduce the question-order effects reported by Bishop and his associates (Bishop, 1987; Bishop et al., 1984).

As more researchers test the behavioral hypothesis of the third-person effect, they must be aware of the ramifications that question-order variations raise for behavioral outcomes. Unlike its perceptual counterpart, the behavioral hypothesis might be affected by question order. Certainly more research is needed to test this proposition. If question-order variations affect behavioral outcomes, then researchers need to investigate what can be done to minimize these artifacts.

Notes

[1] David and Johnson (1998) found no significant difference between the others and self questions (i.e., no third-person perception effect) for one (eating disorder likelihood) of their three outcome undesirability measures (the other two being ideal body weight and self-esteem) when the self question was asked last. The authors concluded that "Although the role of question order might not be discernible for low undesirable outcomes, it plays an important role in high undesirability outcomes" (p. 52).

[2] The sample was drawn from the most recent *Select Phone* CD-ROM national telephone directories database. The last digit of each selected telephone number in the database was randomly changed so that unlisted numbers had a chance to be included.

[3] Regression analyses, with the support for restrictions measure as the dependent variable and either the power or immoral dimension of third-person perception as the independent variable, produced the same results.

[4] In the third-person effect literature, education is sometimes cited as a predictor of third-person effects because education allows people to perceive themselves as more knowledgeable and less vulnerable to harmful media messages than other people (e.g., Gunther 1995; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990; Salwen, 1998; Tiedge et al., 1991). Controlling for education and number of children did not substantially alter the pattern of the zero-order correlation findings. Number of children was also included as a control, because respondents with children might be more inclined to support restrictions on media messages perceived as harmful to children, such as television violence (Cooper, 1996).

[5] Because there is no statistical test to determine whether there is a significant difference among three or more correlation coefficients using the same variables, i.e., the equivalent of an *F* test for correlation coefficients, we used a bivariate test for assessing interactions between the correlation coefficients (see Blalock, 1960).

Appendix: Question Wording

Television Violence

Others Questions: "Some people claim that violence on television has various effects on *society*. I am going to mention some possible effects that people have said television violence might have *on society*. Using a 1-to-5 scale, where 1 means *not at all* and 5 means *very*, please tell me how well you think that each word I mention describes the effects of television violence *on society*." The items were: powerful, persuasive, immoral, strong, indecent, significant, vulgar, and corrupting.

Self Questions: "Again using the 1-to-5 scale, this time tell me how well you think the word describes the effects of television violence *on you*." The items were: powerful, persuasive, immoral, strong, indecent, significant, vulgar, and corrupting.

Support for Restrictions Question: "Using a 1-to-5 scale, where 1 means you *strongly disagree* and 5 means you *strongly agree*, do you think that a government commission should be created with the legal power to ban what it finds to be excessive violence on television?"

Televised Trials

Others Questions: "Some people claim that live television coverage of courtroom trials has various effects *on society*. I am going to mention some possible effects that people have said televised trials have on *society*. Using a 1-to-5 scale, where 1 means *not at all* and 5 means *very*, please tell me how well you think that each word I mention describes the effects of televised trials *on society*." The items were: powerful, persuasive, immoral, strong, indecent, significant, vulgar, and corrupting.

Self Questions: "Again using the 1-to-5 scale, this time tell me how well you think the word describes the effects of televised trials *on you*." The items were: powerful, persuasive, immoral, strong, indecent, significant, vulgar, and corrupting.

Support for Restrictions Question: "Using a 1-to-5 scale, where 1 means you *strongly disagree* and 5 means you *strongly agree*, do you think there ought to be a law banning the news media from televising live trials?"

Negative Political Advertising

Others Questions: "Some people claim that negative political advertisements, in which candidates for public office attack their opponents by name, have various effects *on society*. I am going to mention some possible effects that negative political advertisements might have *on society*. Using a 1-to-5 scale, where 1 means *not at all* and 5 means *very*, please tell me how well you think that each word I mention describes the effects of negative political advertisements *on society*." The items were: powerful, persuasive, immoral, strong, indecent, significant, vulgar, and corrupting.

Self Questions: "Again using the 1-to-5 scale, this time tell me how well you think the word describes the effects of negative political advertisements *on you*." The items were: powerful, persuasive, immoral, strong, indecent, significant, vulgar, and corrupting.

Support for Restrictions Question: "Using a 1-to-5 scale, where 1 means you *strongly disagree* and 5 means you *strongly agree*, would you support a law banning negative political advertisements in which candidates for public office attack their opponents by name?"

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Self, Others, and Restrictions Measures across Question-Order Conditions by Issue and Effect

	R-O-S		R-S-O		O-S-R		S-O-R			Total	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	*M*	*SD*
Television Violence											
Power											
Self	2.09	1.14	2.60	1.38	2.05	1.18	2.53	1.20	3.15*	2.34	1.24
Others	3.63	1.17	3.67	1.13	3.55	1.08	3.47	1.13	0.38	3.58	1.13
Immoral											
Self	2.27^{a}	1.39	3.07^{ab}	1.50	2.23^{b}	1.34	2.78	1.32	4.94**	2.59	1..42
Others	3.65	1.27	3.78	1.24	3.65	1.19	3.52	1.27	0.44	3.64	1.24
Restrictions	3.03	1.51	3.23	1.58	3.25	1.64	2.90	1.54	0.66	3.10	1.56
Televised Trials											
Power											
Self	2.80	1.24	2.64	1.23	2.58	1.26	2.59	1.16	0.40	2.66	1.22
Others	3.52	1.07	3.79	0.88	3.61	1.04	3.55	1.06	0.82	3.61	1.03
Immoral											
Self	2.34	1.53	2.12	1.12	2.05	1.33	2.45	1.29	1.17	2.24	1.34
Others	2.94	1.41	2.80	1.22	2.55	1.30	2.83	1.28	0.98	2.73	1.29
Restrictions	2.90	1.67	3.13	1.48	3.11	1.64	3.05	1.64	0.24	3.05	1.60
Negative Political Advertising											
Power											
Self	2.47	1.03	2.43	1.09	2.44	1.03	2.47	0.99	0.03	2.47	1.03
Others	3.45	1.03	3.26	1.02	3.24	1.00	3.26	0.96	0.58	3.30	1.00
Immoral											
Self	2.59	1.27	3.06	1.36	2.80	1.35	3.12	1.30	2.04	2.92	1.33
Others	3.24	1.22	3.22	1.32	3.43	1.11	3.47	1.14	0.63	3.34	1.21
Restrictions	3.07	1.69	2.87	1.59	3.45	1.76	2.98	1.74	1.29	3.09	1.70

Note. The four question-order conditions are: R-O-S = Restrictions-Others-Self; R-S-O = Restrictions-Self-Others; O-S-R = Others-Self-Restrictions; and S-O-R = Self-Others-Restrictions. Common superscripts within rows indicate significant differences between groups by the Scheffé method at $p < .05$.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 2

Differences in Third-Person Perception Scores across Question-Order Conditions by Issue and Effect

	Restrict.-Others-Self		Restrict.-Self-Others		Others-Self-Restrict.		Self-Others-Restrict.			Total	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	*M*	*SD*
Television Violence											
Power	1.52	1.29	1.03	1.37	1.48	1.35	0.93	1.31	2.97*	1.24	1.35
Immoral	1.31	1.19	0.72^{a}	1.28	1.42^{ab}	1.28	0.74^{b}	1.40	4.69**	1.05	1.32
Televised Trials											
Power	0.74	1.57	1.10	1.30	1.02	1.12	0.95	1.14	0.78	0.95	1.29
Immoral	0.56	1.25	0.58	1.31	0.51	0.83	0.31	0.82	0.65	0.49	1.07
Negative Political Advertising											
Power	0.96	1.30	0.83	1.06	0.80	1.26	0.74	0.82	0.40	0.83	1.12
Immoral	0.68	1.06	0.12	1.10	0.54	1.06	0.34	1.10	2.81*	0.42	1.09

Note. Common superscripts within rows indicate significant differences between groups by the Scheffé method at $p < .05$.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 3

Testing the Perceptual Third-Person Hypothesis across Question-Order Conditions: Paired t Tests Between Others and Self Mean Scores

	Restrict.-Others-Self		Restrict.-Self-Others		Others-Self-Restrict.		Self-Others-Restrict		Total	
	t	*df*	*t*	*df*	*t*	*df*	*t*	*df*	*t*	*df*
Television Violence										
Power	9.01**	(58)	5.62**	(55)	8.16**	(54)	5.46**	(58)	13.91**	(228)
Immoral	8.31**	(56)	4.20**	(54)	8.40**	(56)	4.04**	(58)	11.98**	(227)
Televised Trials										
Power	3.50**	(54)	6.27**	(54)	7.09**	(60)	6.35**	(57)	11.22**	(228)
Immoral	3.41**	(58)	3.21**	(52)	4.95**	(63)	2.74**	(50)	6.95**	(226)
Negative Political Advertising										
Power	5.49**	(54)	6.03**	(59)	4.82**	(57)	6.66**	(54)	11.16**	(227)
Immoral	4.78**	(55)	0.84	(56)	3.72**	(53)	2.36*	(56)	5.71**	(223)

$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

Table 4

Testing the Behavioral Third-Person Hypothesis across Question-Order Conditions: Zero-Order Correlations Between Support for Restrictions and Power and Immoral Effects of Third-Person Perception

	Restrict.-Others-Self		Restrict.-Self-Others		Others-Self-Restrict.		Self-Others-Restrict.		Total	
	r	*n*	*r*	*n*	*r*	*n*	*r*	*n*	*r*	*n*
Television Violence										
Power	.02$_a$	(58)	.08	(52)	.03$_b$	(55)	.41**$_{ab}$	(59)	.14*	(224)
Immoral	.19	(56)	.10	(51)	.18	(57)	.38**	(59)	.22**	(223)
Televised Trials										
Power	.43**	(53)	.08	(52)	.31*	(61)	.12	(58)	.26**	(224)
Immoral	.10	(55)	.19	(51)	.25*	(64)	-.13	(51)	.11	(221)
Negative Political Advertising										
Power	.23	(54)	-.12	(60)	.38**	(58)	.17	(55)	.18**	(227)
Immoral	-.02	(54)	-.07	(57)	.23	(54)	.05	(57)	.06	(222)

Note. Common subscripts indicate significance at $p < .05$ between paired correlation coefficients.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 5

Testing the Behavioral Third-Person Hypothesis with Combined Question-Order Conditions: Zero-Order Correlations Between Support for Restrictions and Power and Immoral Effects of Third-Person Perception

	Restrictions First		Restrictions Last		
	r	*n*	*r*	*n*	Z
Television Violence					
Power	.03	(110)	.23*	(114)	1.48
Immoral	.12	(107)	.30**	(116)	1.43
Televised Trials					
Power	.30**	(105)	.22*	(119)	0.63
Immoral	.14	(106)	.08	(115)	0.42
Negative Political Advertising					
Power	.07	(114)	.30**	(113)	1.71
Immoral	-.02	(111)	.15	(111)	1.25

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

PLEASANT COMPANY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GIRLHOOD: CULTURAL STUDIES THEORY AND METHODOLOGY, A CASE STUDY

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PLEASANT COMPANY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GIRLHOOD: CULTURAL STUDIES THEORY AND METHODOLOGY, A CASE STUDY

ABSTRACT

The American Girl dolls, books, and related products—created, manufactured, and marketed by Pleasant Company of Middleton, Wisconsin—is an enormously successful line of girls' paraphernalia that, until recently, was sold only by mail-order catalog. This paper describes the theoretical and methodological developments, issues,and framework of a study of the American Girl products. I place this study in a feminist cultural studies tradition embracing a broad conception of culture that stresses lived experiences, legitimizes popular culture as a valid research topic, and focuses on conflicts over meanings. This conception of culture renders a brand of cultural studies that looks not only at texts, but at their production, consumption, and their influence in the regulation of cultural life. It also acknowledges and faces the study of culture and communication as both an intellectual and a political endeavor.

Introduction

> We give girls chocolate cake with vitamins. Our books are exciting, our magazine is fun, and our dolls are pretty. But most importantly, they all give girls a sense of self and an understanding of where they came from and who they are today. (Pleasant T. Rowland in Pleasant Company web site, 1998).

In 1985 Pleasant T. Rowland, "a former teacher and textbook author" (Pleasant Company, 1998), founded Pleasant Company. With a staff of four people, the company developed three "historical" dolls and their books: Kirsten, Samantha and Molly. The dolls did not represent actual historical characters. They were historical in the sense that they represent a period in U.S. history. Kirsten was called "a pioneer girl of strength and spirit" from 1854. Samantha was defined as "a bright Victorian beauty" of 1904, and Molly—"a lovable schemer and dreamer"— represented the WWII year of 1944. These dolls, books, and related merchandise were sold only by mail order catalog. In 1990 the company introduced "spunky, spritely colonial" Felicity of 1774. Two years later Addy, the only African American doll, came along. Defined as "a courageous girl of the Civil War," she was historically placed in 1864. In 1997, Pleasant Company introduced its newest doll, Josefina—"an Hispanic girl of heart and hope"—who was situated in 1824 New Mexico. These six dolls, their books (each doll has six books), and assorted related merchandise —which includes clothes, furniture, accessories, and matching outfits for girls—comprise Pleasant Company's The American Girls Collection.

Today, the company has other product lines which are also sold exclusively by catalog: (1) American Girl of Today, which consists of "contemporary " dolls. Girls can choose their doll from 20 different combinations of hair texture, some facial features—such as wider nose and oblique eyes—and skin, hair and eye colors. These dolls come with blank books for girls to write in. Clothing, furniture and accessories are also available for them. (2) The Bitty Baby Collection, five babies that represent different ethnicities—African American, Brunette Caucasian, Blond Caucasian, Asian American and Hispanic— are offered along with clothing, accessories and furniture needed for baby care. (3) American Girl Library which includes a bimonthly magazine and more than a dozen titles such as *Bright Ideas from Girls, for Girls*, *Super Slumber Parties* and *Oops! The Manners Guide for Girls*. (4) American Girl Gear which consists of a line of clothes and accessories for girls ages 7 to 12.

Pleasant Company has also created The American Girls Club and sponsors special events and programs such as "Samantha's Ice Cream Social," "Welcome Josefina!" and "The American Girls Fashion Show." It also boasts a set of museum programs which include "Felicity in Williamsburg," "Kirsten in Gammelgården," "Addy at Ohio Village," "Molly at Strawbery Banke Museum," "Samantha at the Heurich House Museum" and "Samantha at Greenfield Village." The company has its own web page and even sells an interactive CD-ROM.

The company is a huge success. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Mattel's Barbie and Pleasant Company controlled more than 40 percent of the 1996 U.S. doll Market.[1] Having sold 48

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1. It must be noted that Barbie's annual sales of approximately $900 million were three times larger than Pleasant Company's (Vargas, 1997).

million books and more than 4 million dolls, the company amassed sales of $287 million in 1997 (Hellmich, 1998). Its success can also be measured by the amount of competition it has produced. Companies such as Global Friends, The Magic Attic Club, and Just Pretend have all copied the concept of selling dolls exclusively by mail catalog. Each of their dolls also comes with books, costumes, furniture and accessories.

In June of 1998, Pleasant Company was acquired by Mattel Inc. Jill Barad, Mattel's chairperson, has promised that Pleasant Company will be kept as a separate, autonomous unit headed by its founder and the company's headquarters will remain in Middleton, Wisconsin. The deal, in which Mattel paid a hefty price tag of $700 million, made Rowland Mattel's vice-chairperson and earned her a spot as a candidate in *Good Housekeeping*'s "30th annual most admired women poll" (1998). The outcome is an interesting alliance between two very different companies. A small, direct marketing company whose products were created specifically as an alternative to the big company's prime product, Barbie, and a large company which is responding to signs that the retail toy business may be weakening (Bannon, 1998).

Two other important changes occurred in 1998 which were not related to Mattel's purchase (Hajewski, 1998^{a}; Levine, 1998). In July, Pleasant Company opened its first outlet store in Wisconsin, dedicated to the AG Gear line of clothing. In November, American Girl Place opened its doors, "the only place in the world where American Girls dolls can be bought on site" (Hajewski, 1998^{b}, p. 1). This huge store, located in Chicago, includes a boutique, a bookstore, a restaurant, and a theater.

Parents have given rave revues to Pleasant Company's products. News stories about the company usually feature an array of positive parental opinions that stress the educational aspects of the collection, the realism of its characters, the presentation of positive role models, and the overall wholesomeness of the concept which makes them worthy of their high price ($82). AG events have taken place in 46 states, with 200,000 attendants who have helped raise more than $4 million for different non-profit organizations (Phillips, 1998, p. 1C). For instance, in Athens, Georgia, three AG events have been huge successes with sold-out attendances that include girls who live six hours away from the event. In the same town, a local elementary school has "The American Girls Club" as one of its most successful after-school programs. Across the country, bookstores feature AG book clubs that meet on a regular basis. I believe that this success can be defined as a cultural phenomenon.

This paper discusses the theoretical and methodological developments, issues,and framework used in a study of the American Girl products. This discussion does not include the results of the study. I place this research in a feminist cultural studies tradition, attempting to heed Alexander and Morrison's (1995) call for "the monumental task" of doing critical research on children that includes:

> [C]areful ethnographic studies that examine interpretation of texts in the context of children's culture. With a post-modern focus on intertextuality, a semiotic and structuralist microscopic examination of texts, a cultural studies foregrounding of everyday practice, and a strong underpinning of the realities of economic structure (p. 351).

I first explain the reasons for the study of these catalogs, dolls, and books. Then I describe the theoretical grid that organizes and guides this research, its methodological design, and the actual procedure used for gathering and analyzing the evidence. I end by suggesting avenues of future research on the topic.

Significance of the Study

According to du Gay et al (1997), a product is cultural if (a) it is constituted as a meaningful object, (b) it is connected to a distinct set of social practices, (c) it is associated with certain kinds of people and places, producing—in turn—a social profile or identity, and (d) is represented through communication media. I believe that the concept and the collection of products sold by Pleasant Company comply with this definition of cultural since: (a) there are certain meanings—i.e.: educational, wholesome, "American," etc.— that seem to be associated with the AG merchandise, (b) most of the products seem to be connected with the social practices of playing, reading and collecting, (c) the merchandise is targeted specifically to girls in the United States, and (d) the dolls and related products are sold (almost exclusively) by mail catalog, a communication medium that has proven to be highly successful in the U.S (Rosenfield, 1999). In sum, AG dolls are now part of the cultural universe of young girls in this country. This, in itself, sanctions research on the subject.

The topic also presents an interesting set of gender issues. Pleasant Company was founded by a woman and its products are geared exclusively toward girls. Moreover, according to Rowland, 80 percent of her company's employees are women. "That is not by design. But I have to say, they are the only people who believed in the beginning that this could ever happen. Men just didn't understand the idea of the products, didn't think that they were necessary, couldn't understand the subtlety of the different message that we were trying to send" (Rowland as quoted in Morgenson, 1997, p. 132).

Looking at the catalogs we cannot help but notice that one of the themes is the definition of an "American girl." The dolls purport to represent time periods in American history and—in the case of Kirsten, Josefina and Addy—they also represent ethnicities. Representation has always been one of the sites of struggle for feminism. "The women's movement is not only engaged in a material struggle about equal rights and opportunities for women, but also in *a symbolic conflict about definitions of femininity*" (emphasis added, van Zoonen, 1994, p. 12). Feminist scholars have acknowledged the role the mass media play in the construction and representation of the feminine. Nevertheless, research has focused—for the most part—on adult women. There are some studies about teenage girls (Frazer, 1987; Peirce, 1990, 1993, 1995; Evans et al., 1991; McRobbie, 1991; Duffy & Gotcher, 1996; Duke & Kreshel, 1998; Garner et al., 1998). However, the American Girl doll consumers are younger (7-12 year-olds). They are an understudied population.

Feminists scholars argue that there is a need to find previously silenced voices and to study through them "the specificity and power of language(s) and their relation to knowledge, context and locality" (Parpart & Marchand, 1995, p. 2). I believe that girls' voices should be heard. We need to know what kind of ideological work is being performed on them by these products. After all, the company's bottom line is profit. Dolls, books and catalogs—seemingly innocent artifacts and texts—can be deeply ideological. They have the power to reinforce a common sense of sorts that, in reality, could be yet another dose of a dominant ideology that devalues and debases women. On the other hand, they could also be working as empowering tools for these women-in-the-making. In both cases, ideological work is being performed and it needs to be analyzed.

Culture is closely related to meaning and communication (Williams, 1963). Girls who know about the AG dolls share a web of meanings that helps them interpret and make sense of the world. The study of how these meanings are produced, modified and consumed in.everyday life will allow us to understand not only the dolls as cultural artifacts, but also some of the shared meanings and social practices that constitute our culture since "culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings—the 'giving and taking of meaning'—between the members of a society or group" (Hall, 1997ª, p. 2).

Theory

> Cultural studies is not [...] a 'discipline', but an area where different disciplines intersect in the study of the cultural aspects of society (Hall, 1980ª, p. 7).
>
> Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counter-disciplinary field that operates in the tension between its tendencies to embrace both a broad, anthropological and a more narrowly humanistic conception of culture (Nelson et al., 1992, p. 3).
>
> Cultural studies can be defined as an intellectual and political tradition, in its relations to the academic disciplines, in terms of its theoretical paradigms, or by its characteristic objects of study (Johnson, 1986/87, pp. 41-42).

The term cultural studies is not easy to define. There are two main aspects to this difficulty. On the one hand, cultural studies refuses to be strictly defined and defies attempts to impose boundaries on itself because reflexivity, diversity, interdisciplinarity and flexibility are some of its most important and distinctive epistemological commitments.This is precisely its power and also the root of most of the criticism it sustains.

> A codification of methods of knowledge[...] runs against some main features of cultural studies as a tradition: its openness and theoretical versatility, its reflexive even self-conscious mood, and, especially , the importance of critique [...] cultural studies is a process, a kind of alchemy for producing useful knowledge; codify it and you might halt its reactions (Johnson, 1986/87, p. 38).

On the other hand, there is confusion among the different strands of research that are traditionally called "cultural studies." It is important to underscore that even though British and American[2] versions of cultural studies share some important ontological and epistemological beliefs, they also show important theoretical differences that must be acknowledged. Compounding this confusion, cultural studies is sometimes presented as one more qualitative methodology (Potter, 1996), disregarding that it is much more than merely one of the "strategies that lay out the means for achieving the goals of research" (p. 65). In view of this confusion, I begin this section by defining the characteristics of the cultural studies in which I place this study, i.e.: British cultural studies, highlighting the differences with other approaches also known as cultural studies. I also mention the critiques raised against cultural studies, arguing that much of this criticism is based on the analysis of the American version. These critiques regretfully forget or ignore the essence and development of British cultural studies. The section continues with an explanation of the circuit of culture (Johnson, 1986/87; du Gay et al, 1997), and how it is a useful theoretical model for the study of cultural artifacts such as the AG dolls. This is followed by a review of the most important theoretical standpoints underpinning representation, consumption and identity, the three moments in the circuit of culture that are tackled in my study of the AG products.

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[2] Another important strand is Latin American cultural studies. It is influenced by Gramsci, Bourdieu, French postructuralism, and British cultural studies. It is specially concerned with Latin America's disenchantment with democracy, and its representatives tend to play a political role in their respective national cultures (See the Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies, Martín-Barbero (1988;1993) and García Canclini (1993; 1995)).

Cultural Studies

My understanding of cultural studies is heavily influenced by its British version. Therefore, I do not conceptualize cultural studies as a simple methodology of reading cultural texts without any political grounding. One of the central—and most fruitful—tensions in cultural studies is the one between its political and its intellectual concerns. This tension produces both the impetus for new theoretical advancements and the discomfort of traditional disciplines towards cultural studies, which stands out as an interdisciplinary approach that addresses relevant (and many times awkward) issues about culture and society (Hall, 1980[a]).

The foundations of British cultural studies can be found in four texts which analyzed post-WWII British social practices as embedded in historical processes: Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958), *The Long Revolution* (1961), and *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983). These studies used literary criticism as their preferred method of analysis. Later, however, cultural studies was influenced by its encounter with sociology which brought about the inclusion of other qualitative methods and the expansion of its topic of study from texts to "lived practices, belief systems and institutions" (Hall, 1980^a, p. 23).

In the Introduction to *Keywords*, Raymond Williams (1983) sketched some of the hallmarks of cultural studies. First and foremost, he developed an expanded notion of culture (Agger, 1992). Starting from "the original difficult word" (Williams, 1983, p. 14), culture, he analyzed the uses of this word in different areas of inquiry and knowledge and came up with a notion of culture that is more akin to practice and experience than to art or "high" culture. It is a more anthropological definition of culture that emphasizes lived experiences and legitimizes popular culture as a valid area of scholarly research. The topic of cultural studies, then, is the practices and processes that constitute the cultural totality of a society. It is also an important break with the stimulus-response model of communication, since cultural studies acknowledges that culture and meanings are traded between consumers and producers, i.e.: receivers inevitably participate in the construction of meaning.

But the exploration of meaning, for its own sake, is not enough for British cultural studies. Meaning is "embedded in actual relationships, and [...] both the meanings and the relationships are typically diverse and variable within the structures of particular social orders and the processes of social and historical change" (p. 22). In consequence, cultural studies is inextricably linked to questions of political economy—the particular economic and political structures that underlie all social and historical processes.

In general, British cultural studies has honored this connection. However, American versions of cultural studies have avoided the inclusion of issues of power and structures and how these interact with culture and language. James Carey, the "most prominent representative" of American cultural studies (Hardt, 1992, p. 196), consistently burns any bridges between political economy and his brand of cultural studies, rejecting any consideration of power and economic structures in his cultural analyses of communication:

> The archetypal case of communication, once saturated by the economic worldview, is the extension of messages across geography for the purpose of control. However, primordially and politically, the origin of communication is at one with the origins of ritual and religion: not the transmission of intelligent information but the construction

> and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a container for human action—a world of time rather than space. In this sense, communication can at best act as a control and check upon the economic motive, the motive of self-interest—can prevent self-interest from taking over the entire household of the social (Carey, 1997a, p. 69).
>
> [T]he practices of communications and economics and the disciplines that rationalize them contain two opposing conceptions of the self, politics, and community life (p. 73).
>
> The project is, to put it too simply, to revitalize our understanding of communications independent of economics and to revitalize, as a consequence, the political possibilities of the civic republican tradition (p. 73).

For Carey, linking political economy with his "cultural approach to communication" is as reductionist as studying communication as mere "transmission" (Carey, 1975).

Recent criticism of cultural studies has focused on this separation, "the great divide" (Kellner, 1997), between political economy and (American) cultural studies. In frank opposition to Carey, Nicholas Garnham (1997) argues that cultural studies will be successful only "if the bridge with political economy is rebuilt" (p. 57). He calls for a brand of cultural studies that is as interested in production as it is in consumption, and one that does not exaggerate the "freedoms of daily life" (p. 60). Furthermore, Garnham defends political economy against charges of reductionism, arguing that it provides an essential dimension to the study of cultural practices:

> [P]olitical economists find it hard to understand how, within a capitalist social formation, one can study cultural practices and their political effectivity—the ways in which people make sense of their lives and then act in the light of that understanding—without focusing attention on how the resources for cultural practice, both material and symbolic, are made available in structurally determined ways through the institutions and circuits of commodified cultural production, distribution and consumption (p. 72).

However, the notion—lost in American cultural studies—that there is no real distinction within cultural studies between political economy and culture is the greatest single insight of early British cultural studies which does not skirt issues of economic and political power structures. In this sense also, cultural studies breaks with the dominant stimulus-response model of communication, shifting research from a behavioral to an ideological perspective (Hall, 1982).

The term ideology, which is central to British cultural studies, has a long and tortured history in which it has often been demonized and misunderstood, "ideology is invoked sometimes in reference to false ideas, sometimes to mean class-related ideas, and sometimes just to denote generic beliefs" (Thomas, 1997, p. 75). According to Marx those groups who own the means of production thereby control the means of producing and circulating a society's ideas. Throughout history, ideas reflect the economic basis of society, and thus the "ruling ideas" are those of the ruling class which governs a capitalist economy, and correspond to this class' dominant interests. "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determine their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Marx, 1859/1992, p. 45). This contention gives rise to the concept of false consciousness which refers to how subordinate classes make sense of their social and individual circumstances in terms supplied by the prevailing ideology.

This classical Marxism reduces ideology to a mere reflection of the economic base and to be understood only in terms of the superstructure. The concept has been re-theorized by post-Marxists theorists who have influenced British cultural studies scholars. The Frankfurt School members, whose critical theory is a gloomy variant of Marxism, were concerned with the analysis of the nature and consequences of a variety of economic, political and cultural changes that they viewed as typical of capitalist societies. They argued in particular that the mass media—which they called the culture industry—perform a manipulative role in society in favor of the dominant capitalist class (Marcuse, 1968; Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972; Horkheimer, 1978).

Louis Althusser (1969; 1971) rejects a strict interpretation of the base/superstructure formula. According to him, ideology is the representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. It is also the process by which the relations of production are reproduced. Ideology for him is not a mere expression of the economic base, but a practice—rituals, customs, patterns of thought and of behavior—all reproduced through what he calls the Ideological State Apparatuses (education, religion, the family, the media, etc.). Althusser also advanced the concept of "hailing" or "interpellation." He claims that every ideological practice addresses someone, and in doing so, places that someone in a social relationship. That is, ideology turns individuals into subjects.

Althusser's work on ideology was consequential for British cultural studies (Hall, 1980[a]; Morley & Chen, 1996). Gramsci's work was also of special relevance (1971). He developed the concept of hegemony while he was serving time in a fascist prison, seeking to explain why socialist revolutions have not occurred in the advanced Western democracies given the oppressive and exploitative nature of capitalism. The concept suggests a society in which there is a high degree of consensus, in which subordinate classes appear to actively support and subscribe to values, ideals, objectives and cultural meanings which tie them to and assimilate them into the prevailing power structure. Hegemony refers to the process through which dominant ideology is transmitted, social consciousness is formed, and social power is exercised. According to Gramsci, hegemony depends on social actors accepting their subordinate status as normal, rather than on direct manipulation of people against their interests. Hegemony is fragile and always changing. It is not based on force but on "shared meaning and the appropriation of the meaning of life through power, seduction and complicity" (Martín-Barbero, 1993, p. 74). In this way the institutions that Althusser called the Ideological State Apparatuses reinforce each other by perpetuating the status quo as "common sense."

Stuart Hall, one of the best-known scholars in the British cultural studies tradition, argues that "[c]ommon sense is itself a structure of popular ideology, a spontaneous conception of the world, reflecting the traces of previous systems of thought that have sedimented into everyday reasoning" (Hall, 1988, p. 45). He sees ideological processes as being hegemonical, i.e.: as the products of the articulation of different interests in society and as capable of channeling conflict into the system. These are powerful notions that we tend to resist since they imply that language is more than a mere conveyor of reality.

Hall argues that language is a representation system of reality (1997[a]). Representation involves "the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not merely the transmitting of an already-existing meaning, but the more active labour of *making things mean*" (emphasis in the original, Hall, 1982, p. 64). Moreover, the representational work of language is not divorced from ideology or from power. "Significations enter into controversial and conflicting social issues as a real and positive social force, affecting their outcomes. The signification of events is part of what has to be struggled over. [...] Ideology [...] has also become a site of struggle (between competing definitions) and a stake—a prize to be won—in the conduct of particular struggles" (p. 70). Ideology then, is inextricably linked to language and representation.

This problematization of the function of language shows the influence of structuralism and post-structuralism on British cultural studies. Language does not simply name reality. Its function is more complex and powerful. Language organizes and constructs reality. Furthermore, it provides our only access to reality since "important societal and historical processes occur *within* language" (emphasis in the original,Williams, 1983, p. 22).

Structuralism brought to cultural studies the notion that culture is not a reflection of other practices. Culture is a signifying practice that produces meaning, and the object of study should be the internal forms and relations that defined it as a practice:

> Structuralism thus constituted a fundamental decentring of cultural processes from their authorial centre in 'man's project'. Culture was as much constituted by its conditions of existence as it constituted them.[...] It was not so much the product of 'consciousness' as the unconscious forms and categories through which historically definite forms of consciousness were produced (Hall, 1980^a, pp. 30-31).

Post-structuralists have also enriched British cultural studies with their view that meaning is never fixed (Derrida, 1976; 1978), and that knowledge is related to power. Foucault, in particular, brings in the notion of discourse as the means by which institutions exercise their power through definition, exclusion, and the regulation of life. He "has opened up again the problem of 'representation' itself, on which so many theories of ideology and symbolic representation have been based" (p. 37).

However, Carey believes that the encounter between British cultural studies and structuralism and post-structuralism has been a "deeply deforming episode" (Carey, 1997^b, p. 15) which has given cultural studies a "certain philosophical tone and obsession" (p. 17) that has lead it away from the critique of positivism and has reduced "social phenomena to interactions with a text" (p. 17). This is echoed by two of his students, Joli Jensen and John Pauly (1997), who argue for less emphasis on the text and more audience research, especially if it is conducted under the terms of "Illinois cultural studies" which emphasizes "culturalist" theories (e.g.: symbolic interactionism) instead of structuralist ones.

Hall, for his part, asserts that structuralists, i.e.: Saussure, Barthes, Levi-Strauss and post-structuralists, Lacan, Derrida, Kristeva, and especially Foucault, have provided theoretical openness and enrichment to British cultural studies helping further to "break down [the] dichotomy between social practices and the ways they are represented in ideologies, in discourse and in particular regimes of knowledge" (Hall, 1980ª, p. 37). I agree with this position. Cultural studies has been enhanced with the problematization of the role of language and the acknowledgement of the slippery nature of meaning. It has also been enriched with the consideration of how society carefully constructs knowledge and constitutes the individual through division, exclusion and regulation. This latter notion is, in a sense, too contrary to the prevalent ideas (and ideals) in which the United States is based, therefore, their rejection by some American scholars.

Jensen and Pauly's comments also point to another "divide" in cultural studies. Namely, the one between those who believe that cultural studies should privilege the text, and those who think that the audience should be the preferred locus of analysis. These two positions stand for two different theoretical viewpoints in what Dow (1996) has called "the powerful text/active audience debate," which centers around two questions: (1) whether the text is polysemic, and (2) whether the audience is "passive" or "active." Historically, mass communication research has been divided between those perspectives which ask "what the media do to people" (powerful text/passive audience), and other viewpoints which consider "what people do with the media" (polysemic text/active audience) (Moores, 1990). The powerful text/passive audience stance produces research that focuses on the text's ideological effect and assumes that there is only one possible reading of it and that the audience is incapable of different readings. The meaning is considered to be inscribed in the text. Moreover, the text generates subject positions for the reader. A good example of this type of research is the film studies published in *Screen*. On the other hand, the polysemic text/active audience position produces research that looks at how the audience reads the text in different ways. In its extreme form it celebrates what its proponents see as the critical faculties and sensibilities of the audience. John

Fiske's research is a good example of this strand of scholarship (1987; 1989^{a}; 1989^{b}).

Both research streams offer valuable insights. However, their views of the problem are oversimplistic. For example, we need to examine further the suggestion that audiences may be resistant to the mass-mediated constructions of reality and thus, presumably, also to any ideological impact of mass communication. Moreover, this is not a question of establishing the powerful side of the equation: if the text is powerful then the audience are dupes, or the other way around. It is more complicated than that. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model (1980^{b}) provides a good starting point to the understanding of the transactions that occur between texts and audiences. That is, at both ends of the chain of communication—encoding and decoding—symbolic work is being done.

I believe that texts are polysemic to some extent.[3] First, the text is not fully open to any reading the audience members decide. Encoding will construct limitations, constraints and parameters within which the audience will decode. Second, decoding is also determined by the audience's cultural references: her/his education, ideology, religion, ethics, gender, class, ethnicity, etc. But decoding is always work; therefore, the audience is never "passive."

Reception is polysemic too. This reception polysemy depends, as I have mentioned, on the cultural references of the audience. It also depends on other texts and their contexts. This is why I believe that texts are not self-contained[4] and should not be studied that way. Intertextuality is always present and should be acknowledged. The historical moment should also be recognized. It is a mistake (and an impossibility) to analyze texts which have been stripped of their context.

In my view, the power of the text is hegemonical. It contains and channels conflict not through the overt exercise of power, but through representation and signification. What we need to know is how effective can audiences be in the presence of hegemony and the role played by texts in these processes. Do audiences have the same amount of power in their decoding (consumption)

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3. Celeste Condit (1989) argues that it is more accurate to say that texts are polyvalent instead of polysemous. Polyvalence involves different evaluations of the text, due to the instability of its connotative features.

4. See Michael Leff's work on rhetorical criticism (1992) for an example of the study of self-contained texts.

drives this study.

As mentioned, British cultural studies have received a variety of enriching influences that range from classical disciplines such as sociology to particular scholars like Foucault. These influences have cultivated a certain attitude of reflexivity and openness regarding both theory and methods. However, "the most profound challenge to any attempt to establish a cultural studies 'orthodoxy'" (Hall, 1980^a, p. 38) has been the emergence of feminist scholarship, which defied theoretical assumptions, methodological commitments, and research topics that were male oriented. By introducing gender as a legitimate and critical component of all dimensions of culture, feminism displaced class as the main (or only) analytic category through which social patterns are studied.

I place my study of the AG dolls phenomenon in the British cultural studies tradition, embracing a broad conception of culture as a "site of social differences and struggles" (Johnson, 1986/87, p. 39). It is a notion of culture that stresses lived experiences, legitimizes popular culture as a valid research topic, and focuses on conflicts over meanings. This conception of culture renders a brand of cultural studies that looks not only at texts, but at their production, consumption, and their influence in the regulation of cultural life. It also acknowledges and faces the study of culture and communication as both an intellectual and a political endeavor.

The Circuit of Culture

Richard Johnson (1986/87) argued that the project of cultural studies is "to abstract, describe and reconstitute in concrete studies the social forms through which human beings 'live', become conscious, sustain themselves subjectively" (p. 45). In order to tackle this project, Johnson developed a model "with rich intermediate categories, more layered than the existing general theories" (p. 45) in which he depicted a circuit of the production, circulation and consumption of cultural products. The model was intended to serve, not only as a blueprint or guide for how to "do" cultural studies, but also as a demonstration that the cultural process is too complex to be explained by existing theories that are limited to the explanation of one aspect and cannot be generalized to include the other facets of the cultural process:

> What if existing theories—and the modes of research associated with them—actually express different sides of the same complex process? What if they are all true, but only as far as they go, true for those parts of the process which they have most clearly in view? What if they are all false or incomplete, liable to mislead, in that they are only partial, and therefore cannot grasp the process as a whole? (pp. 45-46).

His model specifies the different aspects, "moments," of the cultural process. Different theoretical perspectives could then be used to study each of these moments, which are distinct but, at the same time, dependent on the other moments and essential to the totality of the cultural process, "[i]t follows that if we are placed at one point of the circuit, we do not necessarily see what is happening at others" (p. 46). Johnson specifies four moments: production, texts, readings, and lived cultures. The model also gives importance to the conditions for production, which Johnson places in a continuum between public representations and private lives, and the conditions for readings, placed along an abstract-concrete axis.

Johnson's circuit indicates the order in which the moments occur and influence each other: (1) production, (2) texts, (3) readings, and (4) lived cultures. It also states that lived cultures influence the moment of production. Therefore, even though it is a never-ending circuit, the model specifies a particular direction for its circulation, 1-2-3-4-1- etc. The model is placed on a plane dominated by the two continuums that determine the conditions for production and for readings of cultural products. These two continuums act as a system of parallel axes, almost like railroad tracks, that determine how the circuit moves between the public/"universal" and the private/particular (see Fig. 1).

Recently, Johnson's model has been reworked by a group of British cultural studies scholars from The Open University and used as the framework for the study of the Sony Walkman as a cultural product (du Gay et al., 1997). This circuit of culture shares some of the main principles of Johnson's model. Mainly, its depiction of the cultural process as a complex and interdependent set of moments that are distinct, but not discrete, and the proposition that their individual study only gives us a partial view of how the meanings associated with a particular cultural product are produced, negotiated, and contested. But this circuit of culture also differs in some important ways from Johnson's model. First, it depicts five moments (instead of four), representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. Second, these moments are not presented as happening (or having to be studied) in any particular order. Third, there are no axes or continuums governing the conditions under which each of the moments exist (see Fig. 2).

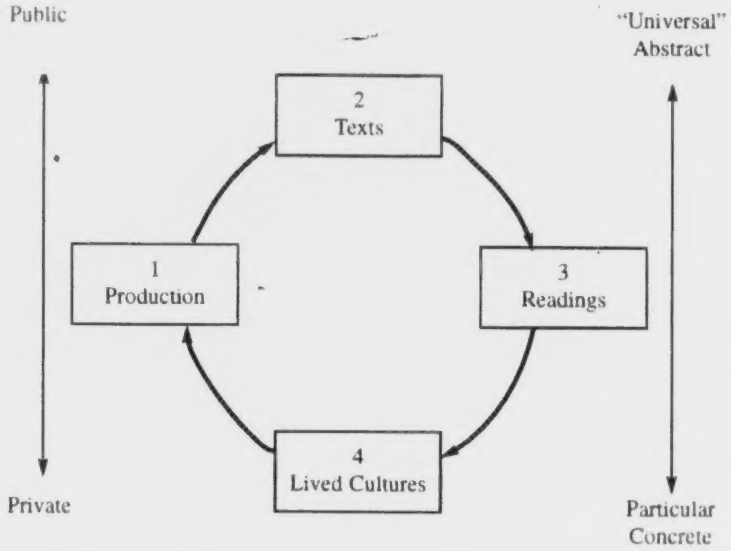
Public
Private
"Universal"
Abstract
Particular
Concrete
1
Production
2
Texts
3
Readings
4
Lived Cultures

Figure 1: Johnson's Circuit
(Johnson, 1986/87, p. 1)

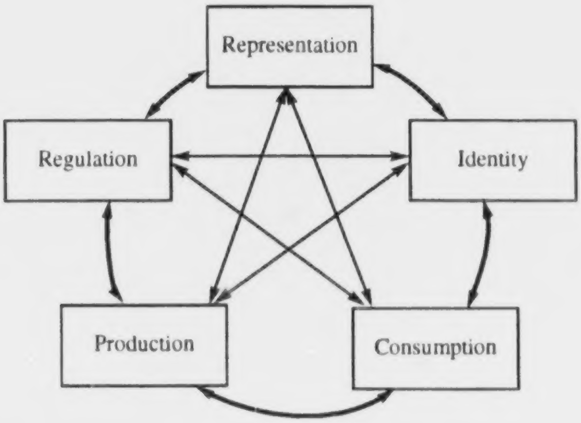
Representation
Regulation
Identity
Production
Consumption

Figure 2: The Circuit of Culture
(du Gay et al., 1997, p. 1)

The circuit emphasizes the relationship between culture and meaning, which is "constructed—given, produced—through cultural practices; it is not simply 'found' in things" (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 14). Meaning is transacted in each of the circuit's moments. *Representation* refers to the production of meaning through language. It "connects meaning and language to culture" (Hall, 1997[a], p. 15). This moment in the circuit highlights the symbolic underpinnings of culture. *Identity* alludes to how a particular cultural product—text, object, practice—acts as a marker that identifies a particular group. In other words, how meanings create an identity. Cultural products are also encoded with meanings in their production process. They are produced in ways that make them meaningful. These encoding processes constitute the moment of *production* in the circuit of culture. But meaning is also produced when we make use of the cultural product in our everyday life. *Consumption* looks at what the product means to those who actually use it. It involves the production of meaning through the incorporation of the product in our daily life. Finally, the circuit of culture examines the impact that a cultural product has upon the *regulation* of cultural life.

As mentioned before, cultural studies has its share of opponents and critics. I believe that the circuit of culture addresses criticism that expresses discomfort with the emphasis on textual analyses over the study of audiences (Jensen & Pauly, 1997) and annoyance at the perception that cultural studies focuses on cultural consumption rather than on cultural production (Garnham, 1997). The circuit of culture provides cultural studies with a blueprint for research that does not privilege texts over audiences or vice-versa. Nor does it assign more importance to production than consumption, or the other way around. It understands cultural analysis as the integral study of these moments. "[I]t is in a combination of processes—in their articulation—that the beginnings of an explanation can be found" (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 3). For all these reasons, I have chosen this model as the theoretical framework for the analysis of the cultural product that constitutes the object of study: the AG dolls and related products.

Representation

Language plays a central role in the production and exchange of meanings. Its signs and symbols stand for objects and ideas. According to Hall (1997[a]), theories of representation can be grouped into three general categories. First, reflective theories which assert that language is a mirror, reflecting meanings that are inherent to persons, ideas, and cultural products. Second, intentional theories which argue that meaning is imposed by speakers and authors, who are the only source of meaning. Third, constructionist theories that separate the material from the symbolic, arguing that it is the symbolic (not the material) which conveys meaning; that is, meaning is constructed using "representational systems" such as language. Cultural studies and, in consequence, the circuit of culture use constructionist theories to explain and analyze the moment of representation.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1974), whose work in linguistics underpins structuralism, developed a theory of representation as construction. According to him, the sign must be analyzed as two elements, the *signifier*—the word(s) or image(s)—and the *signified*, the concept or idea triggered by the signifier. The link between these two elements is arbitrary. Furthermore, signs work by relating their meaning to other signs. That is, they acquire meaning in terms of their difference with other signs. In other words, signs signify in reference to what they are not. Saussure also divided language into *langue* and *parole*. Langue is the rules and conventions that organizes language, while parole is the individual utterances. More importantly, parole is determined by langue. This is structuralism's main insight, i.e.: structure makes meaning possible.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1968) applied Saussure's ideas to anthropology trying to find the rules and conventions, the "unconscious foundations" (p. 18) of primeval Brazilian societies. But Lévi-Strauss' most important contribution to the study of culture is his analysis of myths as parole and his finding that these have similar underlying structures (langue). Roland Barthes' work also focused on myths. His theoretical essay "Myth today" argues that myth functions as a system of representation, adding a second level of signification to Saussure's signifier/signified that is naturalized and taken as "true."

> [W]hat allows the reader to consume myth innocently is that he does not see it as a semiological system but as an inductive one. Where there is only equivalence, he sees a kind of causal process: the signifier and the signified have, in his eyes, a natural relationship. This confusion can be expressed otherwise: any semiological system is a system of values; now the myth consumer takes the signification for a system of facts:

> myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system (Barthes, 1973, p. 142).

The idea of an underlying structure that determines meaning is rejected by post-structuralists who emphasize the slippery nature of meaning. Jacques Derrida (1973) argues that language is endless iterability. Meaning is "always deferred, never fully present, always both absent and present" (Storey, 1993, p. 86). It is scattered along the chain of signifiers. Words contain traces of other words that preceded them in the chain and by their context which are also sets of chains of signifiers. Derrida draws on Nietzsche's critique of the assumption that language reflects the world and gives us access to "truth," "truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions" (Nietzsche, 1990, p. 891). In sum, Derrida argues that language is always ambiguous and metaphorical; therefore, always in need of interpretation.

Nietzsche also influenced Foucault's work, who also rejected the notion of an universal and timeless truth. Instead, Foucault argued that there are "regimes of truth" sustained by discursive formations, texts and practices, that construct meaning while supporting certain institutional patterns and a common worldview. He also took from Nietzsche the view that knowledge works as a weapon of power (Storey, 1993). For him, discourse is the means by which institutions brandish power through processes of definition and exclusion that are, in themselves, regulatory.

> Truth is not outside power [...] Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned [...] the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, 1980, p. 131).

Foucault's work on representation focuses not on language but on discourse as a system of representation. His starting point is the statement, which is not a grammatical sentence or logical proposition. Statements are utterances that establish rules and generate discourse because they contain the possibilities of their own content and create boundaries for it. In other words, statements work in groups that set the conditions of knowledge. These are discursive formations which exhibit certain specifications. First, "surfaces of their emergence," where individual differences will be defined according to "the degrees of rationalization, conceptual codes, and types of theory" (Foucault, 1990,

p. 1130). Second "authorities of delimitation," the major authorities who name and classify, i.e.: those who have the power to define in one way or another the individual differences that are present in our society. Third, "grids of specification," specifying how objects, people, practices are "divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, classified, derived from one another" (p. 1131). These discursive formations will, in turn, open up new discursive formations that will support new regimes of truth that will become part of knowledge and, therefore, will regulate social life in a new way.

Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. That is, meaning is constructed within discourse, which defines and produces knowledge, and governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Foucault then, opposes the commonly-held idea that discourse facilitates the exchange of knowledge but does not create it. For him, author, meaning and knowledge are a function of discourse, not its source. In this way, he argues that discourse should be examined as a representational practice, a constitutive action, and not as a reflection of reality.

Two representational practices merit mention special attention in regards to the topic of this study: stereotyping and advertising. Both practices link representation to identity. Stereotyping is (sadly) a widespread representational practice that "reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature" (Hall, 1997^b, p. 257). It is a good example of how power and knowledge are linked in a Foucauldian sense. It is also an instance that shows the closeness between representation and identity. Hall (1997^b) argues that stereotyping occurs where there are power inequalities which work to accentuate differences that are presented as dividing what is "normal" than what is not. Stereotyping is particularly pervasive whenever ethnic, national, class, and gender differences are stressed.

Advertising, viewed by most as a communication practice, is really both an economic and a representational practice. It has an ubiquitous place in our society. Raymond Williams (1993) argued that it has become "the official art of capitalist society: it is what 'we' put up in 'our' streets and use to fill up to half of 'our' newspapers and magazines" (p. 334). Its goal is to sell a particular product. To do this, advertising represents the product in a way that, first, appeals to the consumer, and then convinces him or her to buy. "Advertising is the cultural language which speaks on behalf of the product. Advertising makes commodities speak. It must address the buyer. It must create an identification between the customer and the product" (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 25). In this sense also, advertising is a representational practice with particular characteristics. At the same time that it represents the product as appealing, advertising constructs a link between the potential buyer and the product. This link is identification through which advertising convinces us that we are the kind of people who would have that particular product.

> The language of advertising—and representation in general—operates as much on fantasy and desire as it does on rational choices and so-called 'real' needs. The people in the advertisements are therefore not a realistic representation of ourselves but an *imaginary* one. [...] In other words, they work by engaging with our idealized self-images and our unspoken desires (emphasis in the original, pp. 25-26).

Sometimes the language of advertising reflects social identities that have been already formed, e.g.: housewives. At other times, advertising constructs the identity through representation at the same time that it also represents the product to be sold. In this sense, advertising tells the consumer "what sorts of identities we can become—and how" (p. 39).

Summarizing, the circuit of culture underscores constructionist theories of representation which hold that meaning is not inherent in cultural products. Instead it is constructed through language (linguistics, semiotics) and/or discourse (Foucault). The latter ties knowledge to power bringing about issues related to the politics of representation. Stereotyping and advertising are conspicuous representational practices that work through difference and identification, and that show the links between representation and identity.

Identity

At its most basic and intuitive level, identity tells us who we are and where we are placed in time and space. This could be construed as a fairly simple and static concept. In other words, identity can be seen as a fixed notion, we are who we are. But the circuit of culture tells us something different. Identities create meanings while they are produced, consumed and regulated within culture (Woodward, 1997). In a sense, the more we look into the question of identity, the more complicated we realize it is.

Issues of identity are always underpinned by the tension between essentialism and anti-essentialism. The former looks at identity as fixed, and therefore, based on nature (race, gender), or based on "an essentialist view of history" (p. 12). Non-essentialist views see identity as ever-changing, based on symbolic characteristics that attempt to differentiate in order to identify. For instance, advertising tells us how the consumption of a particular product influences our identity. Because identity is linked to representation, "identity is constructed in and through language" (Sarup, 1996, p. 47), then we must acknowledge that identity is inextricably related to issues of power, since the power to define who is included in a certain identifiable group is not equally distributed in society.

There is an important psychoanalytic dimension in the study of identity, it is best exemplified by the work of Jacques Lacan (1977), who argued that there is no unitary identity (or self). It is always split and produced through language. Therefore, he argues, it is through language acquisition that subjectivity (our sense of self) is produced. Following Freud, Lacan states that the infant is unable to distinguish him or herself from his mother until he reaches the "mirror stage," in which the child has the first conscious recognition of a distinction between his body and the rest of reality. It is in this stage that the child begins to acquire language and, therefore, is constituted as a subject. However, Lacan warns us, this subjectivity is still split. He goes on to argue that we seek a unified sense of ourselves. This search is done in the realm of the symbolic through a process of identification that allows us to look for an identity that will unify our subjectivity. In other words, Lacan argues that who I am depends on what is other than myself, rendering an "I" that is discursively constructed. That is, our identity is based on a lack, "manque â être," on what we are not. In this sense, Lacan argues that girls acquire their sense of self in a different way than boys. Girls are positioned negatively as lacking a phallus, which is the first signifier of difference that enters the symbolic realm of the child.

Lacan's theories have been contested especially by feminist scholars who reject the view that women are defined by a lack. In particular, Simone de Beauvoir (1953) and Luce Irigaray (1985) argue that these theories establish a dualism in which women are presented as being less than men. This constructs women as "others" and serves as the basis of other pervasive binary oppositions that consistently present women as inferior.[5] Notwithstanding this important criticism, it must be acknowledged that the importance that Lacan places on the symbolic and representational aspects of identity, and his emphasis on difference as the driving force of identity have influenced many scholars.

Designating differences is essential to the construction of identity. The differences are marked through the use of classificatory systems that organize the world and produce a set of meanings shared in each particular culture. Different attempts at explaining how this occurs are the source of different theoretical developments in the area of identity research. For instance, Althusser argued that ideologies "hail" individual as subjects. That is, every ideology confers an identity onto individuals.

> The hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes the subject. Why? Because he has recognised that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was really him who was hailed' (and not someone else) (Althusser, 1971, p. 163).

For Althusser then, identities exist through ideology because it constitutes individuals as subjects.

Derrida argues that a set of binary oppositions can be found inscribed within identities. Binary oppositions are never neutral. One pole of the binary, he argues, is usually the dominant one, the one which includes the other within its field of operations. There is always a relation of power between the two poles. Within binary oppositions "we are not dealing with [...] peaceful coexistence [...] but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs [...] the other or has the upper hand" (Derrida, 1972, p. 41).

Ernesto Laclau draws on the work of Derrida, Foucault and Lacan to reject essentialist perspectives on identity. In opposition to Marxists and neo-Marxists such as Althusser, Laclau argues that identities are not merely the product of class. Identities are always partial and incomplete, multiple and mobil. Laclau's theories produce a "shift from a politics of class identity to a politics of difference" (Sarup, 1996, p. 57). In other words, according to Laclau, we have several identities that only constitute us partially. Identities are dislocated because they "depend upon an outside which both denies that identity and provides its condition of possibility at one and the same time" (Laclau, 1990, p. 39). In consequence, power is always inextricably linked to the relation between identity and the difference that supports that identity.

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[5] For more on this and other dualisms related to the male-female dichotomy, see Cirksena, K. and Cuklanz, L. (1992). Male is to female as _ is to _ : A guided tour of five feminist frameworks for communication studies. In L. Rakow (Ed.) *Women making meaning: New feminist directions in communication.* New York: Routledge.

Our identities are particularly influenced by the idea of nationality. Benedict Anderson (1983) argued that our national identity is based on a shared idea of what constitutes that nationality:

> I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (p. 15).

This imagined community, the nation, is constituted by shared elements: history, myths, land (or claims to it), and culture. Today, the idea of nation is increasingly blurred. In consequence, cultural identity has become the preferred locus of analysis of scholars interested in the fluid and multiple nature of identity. Hall argues that cultural identity is always a project in the making:

> [I]nstead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall, 1990, p. 222).

Hall synthesizes Anderson's and Laclau's respective theories, arguing that cultural identities are comprised of two kinds of ingredients, shared elements and points of difference.

In sum, identity is not fixed, it is socially and symbolically constituted. It involves "symbolic marking" (Woodward, 1997, p. 12) that denotates difference and, at the same time, emphasizes shared characteristics. Identity is always linked to power.

Consumption

The circuit of culture tells us that our identities are also constituted by our consumption practices. This represents a shift from the way in which consumption has been traditionally viewed, i.e.: as a function of the economic process. For instance, until recently, sociology's dominant focus had been on production rather than on consumption. Furthermore, the term consumption has often been associated with waste and use, rendering it less important than production. Hugh Mackay (1997) argues that this is a reflection of Protestant cultural tenets that hold work as "noble and productive" and consumption as "less worthy, frivolous, even wasteful, indulgent, or decadent" (p. 2). Mackay also calls attention to the serious gender implications of this dichotomy in which "the passivity of consumers is congruent with notions of the passivity of women, and the traditionally male world of work is privileged over the female domestic arena" (p. 3). Cultural studies addresses this dualism and the subsequent imbalance between consumption and production by going beyond a narrow economic notion of consumption to conceptualize it as a larger and more autonomous social phenomenon (Friedman, 1994).

Theoretical development in the area of consumption is usually tracked back to Marx's theories which privilege production in all its analyses, and disregard consumption as determined solely by production. Neo-Marxist scholars, however, have become increasingly interested in the study of consumption. For instance, one of the major contributions of the Frankfurt School, the analysis of the culture industry, explained how culture is commodified in order to contribute to social control by hushing people into a silence that perpetuates and preserves the capitalist system (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972). In other words, the culture industry theory suggests that culture has become a narcotic of sorts that anesthetizes consumers so they cannot challenge the system. In this sense, this theory also presents consumption as a passive activity determined by production leaving no space for human agency (du Gay et al., 1997). In consequence, consumers are presented as manipulated victims of capitalism.

In 1899, Thorstein Veblen (1958) was the first to suggest that the consumption of goods acts as an index of social status. He was particularly interested in how the "leisure class," (the nouveau riche), demonstrated its status through the conspicuous consumption of certain goods. In this way, Veblen linked consumption to patterns of social differentiation. Pierre Bourdieu has further developed this idea. He looked at the relationship between cultural goods and lifestyles in France, arguing that consumption goes beyond the economic realm, it is a symbolic activity.

> Consumption is [...] a stage in the process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or

code (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 2)

Bourdieu ties consumption to identity by stating that our consumption patterns are signifiers of our taste, which—in turn—is linked to our identity.

> Taste is the practical operator in the transmutation of things into distinct and distinctive signs, of continuous distributions into discontinuous oppositions; it raises the differences inscribed in the physical order of bodies to the symbolic order of significant distinctions. It transforms objectively classified practices, in which a class condition signifies itself (through taste), into classifying practices, that is, into symbolic expression of class position, by perceiving them in their mutual relations and term of social classificatory schemes (pp. 174-175).

In other words, taste is the base of a classificatory system on which identity is based. Consumption, taste, and lifestyle are symbols of "habitus," a "structured set of [unconscious] dispositions which provide a framework for our exercise of judgement and taste" (Mackay, 1997, pp. 4-5). Habitus then, is particular to each social class, allowing its members to operate in their everyday life, and rendering a notion of consumption that is socially structured. Bourdieu's theories have been criticized for their view of class as the main determinant of consumption, and for their presentation of an unduly restrained consumer, which harkens back to the pessimistic views of the Frankfurt School.

However, theorists have drawn on Bourdieu's proposition that consumption is both a symbolic and an economic activity to look at consumption as a productive activity in which meaning is created. For instance, sub-cultural analysis (Willis, 1978; Hebdige, 1979) looks at how certain groups use commodities to signify an identity that attempts to be oppositional. These studies highlight the active nature of consumption and the polysemy of commodified goods as signs. This view is taken further by scholars who theorize the "pleasures of consumption" perspective (Chambers, 1986; Fiske, 1989[b]) in which the consumer is presented as unrestrained and creative in his or her meaning making through consumption. In other words, consumer goods are totally polysemic and the consumer is completely free to use them to produce meaning and hybrid identities through their consumption. The main problem with this view is that meanings encoded in the production process are disregarded, rendering a theoretical picture that highlights the links between consumption and identity but that also disconnects consumption and production.

Michel de Certeau (1984) argues that meanings are made in our everyday use of goods and products. Consumption is productive because it modifies the consumer, the commodity, and the production process. However, de Certeau stresses that consumption is always inscribed within a range that is defined by, but is not equal to production:

> To a rationalised, clamorous, and spectacular production corresponds another production, called 'consumption'. The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through ways of using the products imposed by a dominant order (pp. xii-xiii).

In this way, de Certeau strikes a much-needed balance between consumption and production, presenting the former as an activity that is underpinned by the tension between creativity (of the consumer) and restraint (imposed by production). His emphasis on everyday life, stresses the situated character of consumption, which conditions our space—homes, schools, etc.—and helps shape our identity.

My study of the AG dolls is informed by de Certeau's arguments. However, it is important to mention Jean Baudrillard's view of consumption. He argues that we live in postmodern times in which the lines between representation and reality have disappeared, rendering a reality that is solely constituted by signs which have lost their referent. In opposition to Bourdieu's belief that our consumption patterns are determined by class, Baudrillard argues that what we consume, i.e.: signs and signifying practices, determines who we become.

> Consumption is a myth. That is to say, it is a *statement of contemporary society about itself*, the way our society speaks itself. And, in a sense, the only objective reality of consumption is the *idea* of consumption; it is this reflexive, discursive configuration, endlessly repeated in everyday speech and intellectual discourse, which has acquired the force of *common sense*.
>
> Our society thinks itself and speaks itself as a consumer society. As much as it consumes anything, it consumes *itself* as consumer society, as *idea*. Advertising is the triumphal paean to that idea (1998, p. 193).

These provocative arguments reinforce the main idea conveyed by the circuit of culture, i.e.: representation, consumption, identity, production, and regulation are distinct, though inextricably related moments in the life of cultural products and practices.

Methods

All research, both in the natural and social sciences, makes knowledge claims. However, in doing so, it inevitably raises epistemological questions. These are taken for granted most of the time and are not made explicit. I believe that research methods need to be subjected to critical scrutiny. What is most in need of examination is not the outcomes of research (which is the way methods are usually assessed), but also the epistemological commitments of any research. This can be accomplished through a reflexive analysis of the research process and of the role of the researcher within that process.

Epistemology is concerned with answering questions about who can be a knower, what counts as knowledge, the ways we acquire it, and what kinds of things can be known. These epistemological concerns are intertwined with ontological views about the world/reality. According to mainstream paradigms, the answers to the epistemological concerns stated above are: that the ideal knower is value-neutral and rational, knowledge is the product of the application of the scientific method (therefore, generalizable and predictive), and only those things that are directly observable and quantifiable can be known. This study has been conducted under a different perspective that assumes that there is no single epistemology, i.e.: no single set of rules that determines what counts as knowledge. In this view, the test of knowledge for the social sciences is not generalization and/or prediction but meaning, interpretive power, and illumination (McKenzie et al., 1997). The focus is on human action and interaction which is meaningful and therefore can be interpreted.

Methodologically, my study of the AG products is a cultural analysis that uses qualitative methods for evidence gathering and analysis. This choice carries a series of epistemological assumptions and commitments. First, there is no single reality, i.e: reality exists only in reference to the observer. In consequence, the researcher (who is the principal observer) is part of the evidence. Second, reality does not have to be simplified or subdivided in order to be studied. The research process should maintain and acknowledge, as much as possible, the complex nature of reality. Finally, the goal of research is not the breadth seemingly provided by statistically-based generalization. The objective is depth in the interpretation and explanation of given situations, issues, or individuals.

"[W]hat generality it contrives to achieve grows out of the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions" (Geertz, 1973, p. 25).

This qualitative study of the AG dolls is informed by a critical feminist perspective which rejects the main characteristics of traditional research, in general, and traditional communication research in particular (van Zoonen, 1994). Feminist scholars argue that knowledge about women has been, for the most part, constructed by men. This knowledge is the product of traditional modes of research that entail and encourage distance and noninvolvement between the researcher and researched and assumes that the researcher can objectively appraise his or her object of study. This seemingly objective line of research presents us a view of reality that offers dominant groups a picture that pleases them and that reinforces and legitimizes the way things are (Hall, 1982).

Feminist approaches to research, rooted in this critique of traditional research, have several characteristics that make them particularly appropriate for this study. First, they include the notion that gender is a critical component of all dimensions of culture. Sandra Harding (1987; 1989), Karen Foss and Sonja Foss (1989) credit feminists with the inclusion of gender—the idea of a systematic social construction of masculinity and femininity—as a research component and analytic category through which social patterns can be understood.

Second, women's experiences constitute important empirical and theoretical resources. Traditionally, research has asked questions that are of interest to (mostly white) men. Furthermore, scientific research judges the quality of the research process without looking at the starting point of the inquiry, that is, the research questions and hypotheses. In frank opposition to this, feminists assert that the questions asked—along with the gathering of evidence and the answers produced—determine the adequacy of the research process (Harding, 1987). Feminist research generates its questions, hypotheses, design of research projects, collection, and interpretation of data from the perspective of women's experiences. In this sense, feminist research is concerned with everyday life (Fonow & Cook, 1991). Research interests include taken-for-granted, commonplace features of our lives. In consequence, feminist approaches to research are often creative and spontaneous in the selection of topic and method. Because feminist theory sees clear distinctions in women's lives between public and private meanings, they explore the tensions and discrepancies between the roles and expectations that the dominant culture imposes on women and the meanings that women acquire through their personal experience. In most cases these discrepancies and tensions force women to depreciate their own experiences in favor of the dominant—male—culture or paradigm. This is yet another reason that warrants research based on women's experiences.

Third, in sharp contrast with the traditional research tenet of the "objective" scholar, feminist research insists that the researcher be placed in the same critical plane as the subject matter (Harding, 1987; Langellier & Hall, 1989). That is, the researcher's class, race, culture, gender assumptions, beliefs, behaviors, and reactions during the study must be included in her/his research report. In this way, the entire process is subject to scrutiny and becomes part of the results. The researcher then, is a real, historical individual, not an anonymous voice of authority.

Fourth, traditional approaches to research have been interested in answering questions about women that are born from a desire/need to control, manipulate or exploit women. In contrast, feminist research contributes to women's liberation by producing knowledge that can be used by women themselves. Feminism is both an intellectual perspective and a socio-political movement (Zalk & Gordon-Kelter, 1992). Therefore, feminist research should strive for social change. It is not simply about women but *for* women (Harding, 1989; Fine, 1992). That is, the purpose of the research is not to generate new knowledge only for the sake of knowledge, but to empower women.

Fifth, feminist researchers do not ignore the emotional dimensions of inquiry. Feminist epistemology pays attention to the role of affect and emotions in the production of knowledge. In consequence, there is a recognition that emotions are both a source of insight and a signal of tension. The emotional content of women's lives is considered an integral part of the research agenda. Furthermore, feminists value principles that have been traditionally characterized, trivialized and devalued as "female," i.e.: nurturing, caring, concern, cooperation, etc. Feminists' attention to the affective components of research is translated into a commitment to the welfare of the research participants and a willingness to admit that participation in the research process has therapeutic value (Fonow & Cook, 1991).

Sixth, feminist scholars are aware that language often reflects male experiences. There is a "lack of fit" between women's lives and the words available for speaking about their conditions and circumstances (Devault, 1990).Women often "translate" their experience using a double-voiced discourse in which the manifest meaning is expressed in the accepted vocabulary while there are latent meanings that are closer to their experience and that seldom come to the surface. Meanings that, in fact, disappear. Feminist scholars highlight the struggle with the problems of language that is present in all aspects of the research process. This is one of the reasons why they favor unstructured interviews instead of survey research. They also emphasize the need to learn how to "listen" for the everyday processes of "translation" that are part of women's speech. Feminist research works on learning to listen in ways that are personal, disciplined and sensitive to differences.

In sum, a feminist approach to research is particularly appropriate for this study since it acknowledges the political nature of reality and research, attempts to give voice to those who have been traditionally silenced, and brings to the forefront ways of knowing that have been historically disregarded and devalued as "feminine."

Representation and Identity: Textual Analysis

Textual analysis recognizes a fundamental assumption of this study, i.e.: that meaning is a social production and, as such, is embedded in issues of power. Fiske (1987) argues that textual analysis acknowledges that

> [T]he distribution of power in society is paralleled by the distribution of meanings in texts, and that struggles for social power are paralleled by semiotic struggles for meanings. Every text and every reading has a social and therefore a political dimension, which is to be found partly in the structure of the text itself and partly in the relation of the reading subject to that text (p. 272).

The method is different from content analysis. Recurrence of patterns is not quantified, it is rather considered and analyzed as "pointers to latent meanings" (Hall, 1975, p. 15). Position, placement, tone and allusions are also considered in the analysis. Ultimately, the object of the analysis is not the meanings of the text, but rather the construction of those meanings through the text (Lester-Massman, 1989).

In the "Introduction" to *Paper voices: The popular press and social change, 1935-1965*, Stuart Hall (1975) explains textual analysis and its usefulness. It is important to point out that the method is as evidence-based as any quantitative textual methodology. The evidence is precisely the text. Therefore, the textual analyst should present enough textual material quoted directly to persuade readers that the evidence has been thoroughly examined and convincingly interpreted.

Textual analysis is an interpretive method. In consequence, the role of the critic/interpreter is crucial. The Frankfurt School theorists believed that criticism is a necessary vantage point from which to evaluate culture and that scholars could, therefore, "judge." Poststructuralists, on the other hand, maintain that cultural critics have no reliable ground from which to criticize. I believe that every research, criticism, "reading," takes a stand and we must acknowledge that. I also agree with Condit's argument that critical analysis should be rhetorical in the sense that it should be as local as possible, mindful of its topic and its audience (1989). Regarding our interpretations, we need to acknowledge that while we do not know all the possible understandings (meanings) that could be derived from a particular text, we can make arguments about the kinds of meanings that *can* be in the text. This in no way should be interpreted as our attempt to "tell" people which is "the" meaning of the text. As Dow (1996) argues, we look for the possibility of meaning in the text, not for its discovery or revelation.

Textual analysis has been applied to studies of film and television (Fiske & Hartley, 1978; Tulloch & Alvarado, 1983; Fiske, 1992). As for its application to print journalism, *Paper Voices* is probably the best-known and most important project since it described the method and placed newspapers as more than transparent conveyors of information. Stuart Hall and other members of the Birmingham School used textual analysis to further develop the study of social relations through the study of journalistic discourse in *Policing the crisis: Mugging the state, and law and order* (1978).

Jack Lule (1989; 1991; 1993; 1995; 1997) has used textual analysis to study how the print media constructed several national and international news events such as the shooting of KAL flight 007, the space race, the hijacking of TWA flight 847, and boxer Mike Tyson's trial for rape. Marian Meyers (1994) analyzed the newspaper coverage of the murder of a battered woman in an effort to demonstrate the interconnection of gender, race and class in the representation of violence against women. Elizabeth Lester has used the methodology to analyze the newspaper coverage of international events (1994^a; 1994^b) and the Banana Republic's (1992) and J. Peterman's mail order catalogues (1998).

The historical conditions of production and of consumption of the text must be considered in every textual analysis. The text is not the end in textual analysis, it is the means by which we study a signification process, a representation of reality.This process of "decentering" the text (Johnson, 1986/1987)—of studying the text as a process— is what distinguishes textual analysis from qualitative content analysis, in which the text remains at the center of the analysis. In qualitative content analysis, content is classified through open coding categories. Meaning is found solely in the text itself and not in the processes of its production and consumption. In other words, the conditions surrounding the text—other texts, historical, political, economic and cultural circumstances—are simply the context for qualitative content analysis. While in textual analysis they provide the ideological and mythic structure used to create the dominant reading.

The text analyzed includes two and a half years of Pleasant Company's catalogs (Fall 1996-Winter 1999). However, all catalogs since 1995, all the books of The American Girl Collection and The American Girl Library, plus a year of American Girl magazine were also read in order to provide a more thorough "soak" and understanding of the representation process.

According to Hall (1975), the method calls for three distinctive stages: (1) A "long preliminary soak" (p. 15) in the text, which allows the analyst to focus on particular issues while preserving "the big picture." (2) Close reading of the chosen text and preliminary identification of discursive strategies and themes. (3) Interpretation of the findings within the larger framework of the study. The objective throughout was to find the catalogs' "economy of meaning" (Lidchi, 1997, p. 166). That is, how meaning is produced through language that represents these dolls and related products, and how these meanings are associated with a particular identity: American girls.

Identity and Consumption: In-depth Interviews

Identity was also analyzed through in-depth interviews of mother/daughter(s) units, in which the daughter(s) own an American Girl doll. These interviews were also the base for the analysis of the moment of consumption. My intention was to gather information from their perspective. In this sense, the girls and women interviewed were not simply subjects of my research, but co-participants in the struggle to understand the AG doll phenomenon.

The interviews were informed by feminist tenets of good research (Oakley, 1981; Kasper, 1994). I looked at the participants as the experts. It was only through *their* perspective that I could learn about the concepts and processes I was interested in. I worked on becoming an informed researcher in order to be able to better understand my participants. That meant preparing myself thoroughly before interviewing the girls and their mothers. This preparation included continuous environmental scanning of anything and everything related to dolls, doll playing, doll collecting and Pleasant Company. It also involved reading all the books of the two AG collections and the AG magazine, the textual analysis of 1997 AG catalogs (a smaller number of catalogs than the one included in the full textual analysis of representation and identity), attendance to local AG events with my own daughter, and my participation as the "reader" in a local "Welcome Josefina!" event, which gave me an inside view of the organization of these events.

Other consequences of approaching the interviews from a feminist perspective included bracketing any biases or preconceived notions about the topic by being explicit about them in the process of writing the final report. I conceptualized and conducted the interviews as a collaborative process between the participants and me. I also privileged unstructured, conversational forms of the interview. Even though I prepared interview guides for girls and mothers, participants were allowed and encouraged to drift away from the themes imposed by this guide. Throughout the hours I spent listening to these girls and women, I felt as their advocate, having the responsibility of giving them a voice about a topic that is usually trivialized and disregarded as unimportant.

Decisions about the methodological design were made after conducting a pilot study, which included: (1) reading of Pleasant Company's catalogs, magazines and books; (2) a preliminary textual analysis of fourteen catalogs; and (3) interviews with three girl/owners of American Girl dolls and their mothers. The pilot study was helpful and instructive in raising issues related to my research. In particular, it helped me foresee the problems associated with interviewing children.

I interviewed sixteen mother/daughter(s) units. Three of these constituted the pilot study. In total, twenty-one girls participated in the study. These numbers were determined by the achievement of redundancy (McCracken, 1988; Weiss, 1994). There were three units that consisted of two sisters and their mother. There was one instance in which the interview unit included three sisters and their mother.

Participants were recruited using a version of the snowball sampling technique (Rubin, 1986; Press, 1991; Brown, 1994), i.e.: I started with a friend of my daughter who owns several AG dolls and then asked for references of friends, neighbors or relatives who also owned these dolls. I also used a list compiled at two local AG events. In each case, I contacted the mother by phone explaining the object of the study and the characteristics of the interviews. All the women contacted agreed to participate along with their daughters.[6] The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. The participants' ages ranged from seven to fourteen years old. They are all caucasian, living in Athens, Georgia and surrounding towns: Watkinsville, Winterville, Bogart, and Statham. Their socio-economic levels range from middle to upper class. Most attend public schools, although some are home-schooled. Only one participant attends a private school. For each mother-daughter(s) unit, I interviewed the girl(s) first, if possible in her own bedroom or playroom, i.e.: wherever she happens to spend time with her dolls. Sisters were interviewed together. In these cases, questions were directed at the younger sister first, in order to avoid that her responses would be influenced by the older sister. Mothers were not present during their daughter's interview but were offered access to recordings and transcripts if they so wished. The mother's interview followed immediately. Daughters were not present at this time. The interviews duration ranged from 45-90 minutes for the girls and 35-60 minutes for the mothers.

Interviewing women and girls demanded two different approaches since it is often the case that it is more difficult to elicit information from children than from adults. The mothers were, most likely, familiar with the concept of the interview; while the girls may not have been, especially the younger ones. A related problem is that children assume that when an adult poses a question he or she (the adult) already knows the answer, or the question is asked because the child is in some kind of trouble. Therefore, children are not used to adults that want to learn from their experiences. In consequence, children may "clam up" when interviewed or may render monosyllabic answers.

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[6] Like Sue Cannon, who interviewed women with breast cancer (1992), I was worried that participants might see my desire to interview them at home as an intrusion in their lives. Also like Cannon, I was happily surprised that they did not feel that way and opened up their homes to me.

In order to deal with these problems, Graue and Walsh (1998) suggest the following: (1) Interview young children in pairs or triads. (2) Use well-formed hypothetical questions that will allow older children to move away from trying to give the "right" answer. (3) Ask third-person questions. This will communicate that the interviewer sees the child as an expert and that he or she is not trying to examine the child's privacy.

In order to communicate this idea, I started the girls' interviews by telling them that I had come to learn from them, since they—not I—have the AG doll expertise:

> **Interviewer:** I am the one who has to learn here, because ...there were no AG dolls when I was a little kid, so I did play with dolls, but not the AG dolls...so *you* are the expert here and I need to learn from you...and from what I've heard, you're quite an expert! So...I've been looking forward to this interview. Let me start by asking your age...how old are you?

I also volunteered information about having a daughter who is also an AG dolls owner and manifested how interested I am in this topic. These overtures established immediate rapport between the young participants and me. I also followed Graue and Walsh's suggestions, which proved to be very helpful. Interviews with sisters were more dynamic and fluid than one-on-one interviews. Hypothetical and third-person questions were able to elicit a wealth of information from the young participants, who—by the end of the interview—would express that it had been "fun" to talk about "these things."

After each interview, I would immediately write down notes regarding my impressions of the girl and mother, their family, their house, and the general atmosphere during my visit. The interviews were then transcribed and pseudonyms were assigned for confidentiality reasons. The interviews' analysis consisted of five steps: Stage one, usually unacknowledged by most scholars, was performed by each participant when she chose to highlight (or avoid) certain themes and her interpretations of them during the interview (Kasper, 1994). Stage two involved reading the transcript and the preliminary identification of concepts and categories of analysis—themes—that appeared in the interviews. These themes, along with comments, were written in the margins of the transcripts. Stage three consisted of the construction of "excerpt files" (Weiss, 1994, p. 155). That is, each theme had a file that contained pertinent excerpts from the interviews. During this stage, the definition of the themes was refined to the point in which only over-arching themes had excerpt files constructed. The fourth stage involved summarizing each excerpt file, i.e.: what do respondents said in this area, what do I think it means, and what variants did I find. Finally, stage five related the over-arching themes with the particular theoretical framework of the study (Kasper, 1994). All of these methodological stages were underpinned by a struggle to: (1) find the connection between facts and meanings; (2) uncover how these meanings are related to themes in each participant's life experience; and (3) find the links between each individual interview and those of the rest of the participants.

In sum, textual analysis allows me to delve into the area of representation, while the mother/daughter interviews deal with issues of identity and consumption (See Fig. 3). The articulation of these findings provides an analytical picture of a seemingly insignificant aspect of popular culture, the American Girl dolls, and—in turn—enables me to look at important aspects of American culture. The circuit of culture, as a theoretical tool that guides the methodology used, allows me to explore how this particular collection of artifacts carries ideological baggage, and how girls and mothers negotiate these meanings in their everyday life. In other words, I use the circuit of culture, along with qualitative methodologies approached from a feminist perspective, to explore the encounter between a seemingly innocuous cultural artefact and its audience.

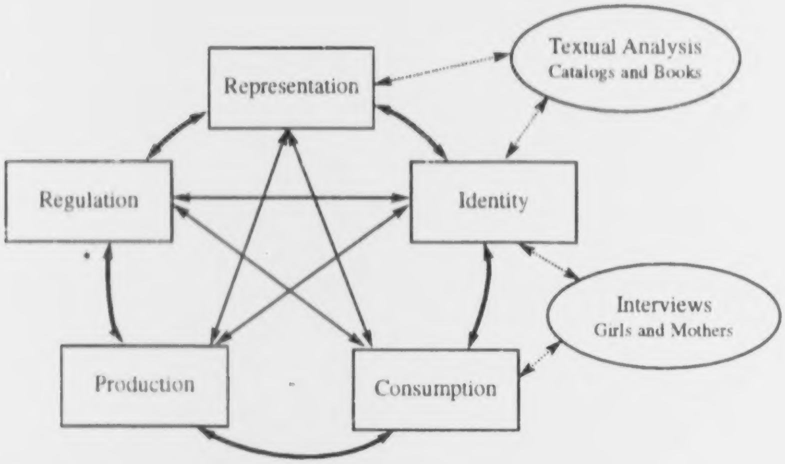
Textual Analysis
Catalogs and Books
Representation
Regulation
Identity
Interviews
Girls and Mothers
Production
Consumption

Figure 3: The Circuit of Culture and Methods

Future Research: Closing the Circuit of Culture

The study described in this paper is only the beginning of more work on the AG products and on much-needed media studies centered on girls. I was satisfied with the textual analysis of the catalogs and books. The method foregrounded the cultural work performed by the texts and their construction of meanings and identity through representation. However, the variety of AG texts and products did not allow for textual analyses of all of them. For instance, the bimonthly *American Girl* magazine is an important AG text that should be the focus of a textual analysis. Expensive ($3.95 per issue, $19.95 per one-year—six issues—subscription) and with no commercial advertisement, the magazine boasts a circulation of 800,000. Its analysis is an essential part of the understanding of Pleasant Company's products and the community of girls united by them. I believe that the study of the store in Chicago, American Girl Place, is also obligatory. It should include both the textual

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analysis of the experience associated with the store,[7] and interviews with people who have shopped, dined, and being entertained in it.

In general, I was also satisfied with the interviews. I was able to establish immediate rapport with both girls and mothers who expressed their happiness at being able to talk about a topic that is important in their lives. All the participants of the study were white and from Northeast Georgia. They provided wonderful insights into the issues that concerned me in this study. Nevertheless, an obvious future line of research is to conduct the interviews with different groups of participants, such as other ethnic groups in Northeast Georgia. It would also be important to interview girls and mothers from cities in which multiculturalism and ethnic diversity have transformed the social formation and its public spaces, e.g.: Miami, New York, Los Angeles. In addition, I would like to interview New Mexican girls and mothers of all ethnicities. I am interested in their perception of the AG dolls in general, and of Josefina in particular, and how these contrast with the reports of Northeast Georgia participants.

The AG dolls are beginning to transcend the U.S. borders. For instance, economically-privileged girls in my native Venezuela are acquiring these dolls. Given my understanding of the Venezuelan culture and my knowledge of the Spanish language, I would like to learn about these girls and their mothers. What are the meanings associated with the AG dolls for girls whose historical markers are not the colonial, the pioneer period, WWII, etc? How do they consume the AG dolls when they cannot read the catalogs or books because they do not speak English? These are some of the questions that would guide the study.

In order to close the circuit of culture, I intend to study the moments of production and regulation. The study of Pleasant Company's research and development of new products is essential to the understanding of how meanings are inscribed in production. This part of the study requires access to the company through interviews and/or document analysis. In this way, we could find answers to questions such as: why are immigrant girls portrayed through Scandinavian Kirsten, instead of using, for example, an Irish or an Italian girl? Why is hispanic Josefina placed in New

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[7] For a similar analysis focusing on the Coca-Cola Museum in Atlanta, see Fürsich & Lester (1998).

Mexico (Mexico) in 1824? Why not develop a hispanic character/doll based on a Cuban girl who arrived to Miami on a balsa in 1964, or a Puerto Rican girl living in New York City? Why is Addy set in the Civil War and not in the Harlem Renaissance? Are there plans to develop Native American, Jewish, or Islamic dolls/characters? Why set up a huge store when they were so successful through direct marketing? Furthermore, the analysis of production should include the study of the changes derived from Mattel's purchase of Pleasant Company. Looking at these changes will inevitably lead us into the study of how the AG dolls have influenced the regulation of cultural life by changing the doll market and the parameters of consumption of dolls and girls paraphernalia.

In sum, this study and the future avenues of research described above will provide a thorough cultural study of the AG dolls. A contribution to the scant literature on girls and popular culture and to the important academic area of feminist cultural studies. A cultural analysis that will allow us to scrutinize who constructs girlhood and how this is done, the role played by the media in this construction, and its lasting influence in the lives of women.

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Looking Beyond Job Approval: How Media Coverage of the Monica Lewinsky Scandal Influenced Public Opinion of the Presidency

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Abstract

Last year's Executive scandal involving Monica Lewinsky perplexed many media experts because a story of such magnitude would normally be expected to heavily sway public opinion of the presidency, yet most media accounts described minimal fluctuations. Anchored in agenda setting, priming, and the elaboration likelihood model of attitude change, the purpose of this paper was to, over time, trace and compare media coverage of the Monica Lewinsky scandal to public opinion of the presidency. Findings suggest that media coverage of the scandal preceded changes in public opinion about the presidency (job approval and perceived favorability). The data also show that newspapers and television news wield similar influence on perceived favorability, but newspapers are more related to swings in job approval, albeit weakly. Additionally, the data provide some evidence for second-level agenda setting, priming, and attitude change. Finally, media influence on perceived favorability is shown to be robust when controlling for external factors (time & economic indicators) but is not robust with respect to job approval.

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Background

Introduction

Last year's Executive scandal involving Monica Lewinsky perplexed many media experts because a story of such magnitude would normally be expected to heavily sway public opinion of the presidency, yet most media accounts described minimal fluctuations (e.g., Mitchell & Elder, 1998). Surely, mass communication and political science scholars must be equally bewildered, given the influence mass media is acknowledged to exert on perceptions of politicians (e.g., Roberts, 1997). While much conjecture and speculation has surrounded the possible impact of this story on public opinion, a systematic, empirical analysis has yet to be conducted to assess its influence. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to fill this lacuna in research by, over time, tracing and comparing media coverage of the Monica Lewinsky scandal to public opinion of the presidency. Unlike many press pundits and White-House spin doctors who have only searched for immediate negative effects on presidential job approval, we suspect some media influence to exist but can probably only be detected by appropriating a longitudinal research design such as the one employed for this project.

Presidential Assessment and Public Opinion

Public evaluations of the presidency typically have been operationally defined as the level of presidential job approval (e.g., Mueller, 1970). According to some research in this area, the principal factors that alter presidential popularity are new administrations, international events, the economy, and war (Simonton, 1987). Indeed, Dick Morris's famous explanation for Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential election victory ("It's the Economy Stupid") is especially telling in the context of presidential job approval. Notwithstanding the impact of these forces, other factors are also central in shaping presidential job approval, including time (e.g., Stimson, 1976)—especially the early-term honeymoon--, audience demographics (Zukin & Carter, 1982), and party identification (Edwards, 1983).

Of particular importance to public appraisals of the president is the impact of mass media (Graber, 1982). For example, Brody & Page's (1975) news discrepancy theory submits that Executive job approval is inextricably linked to the amount of positive media coverage a president receives. Elsewhere, Brody (1991), in a rigorous analysis of news and the presidency, reported that media coverage of the White House significantly predicts job approval, even when controlling for the early-term honeymoon, policy proposals, economic factors, international events, and time. Finally, Edwards (1983) conveys that "studies of press coverage of presidential elections have concluded that the public's information on and criteria for evaluating candidates parallels what is presented in the media" (p.165). Shanto Iyengar and his colleagues have formally developed this broad notion into the theory of priming (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), which argues that the qualities and characteristics emphasized in media texts dictate how politicians are judged by the public (to be discussed further below). Ultimately, mass media do help cultivate impressions about politicians but should not be misconstrued to be the predominant influence.

Conceptual & Methodological Question of Job Approval

While the lion's share of both political science and mass communication literature assumes job approval to be the chief indicator of people's assessments of the Executive Branch, there are a slew of conceptual and methodological reasons for considering additional measures to evaluate the president. First, public appraisals of government officials certainly encompass more than mere job approval. Though perceived performance is critical, perceptions of personality traits also contribute to overall images of politicians (e.g., Popkin et al., 1976; Nimmo & Savage, 1976). For example, McCombs et al. (1997a), in study of Spanish elections, found that newspapers and voters used personality traits when describing political candidates more frequently than either qualifications or issue positions. Some of the more prominent personality traits to be affected by media coverage of government officials are integrity, ideals, sincerity, and honesty (Kinder, 1986; Edwards, 1983). Hence, public evaluations of politicians are multifaceted and operational definitions should therefore extend beyond simple job approval. In fact, Zukin & Carter (1982) write that "other ways of assessing presidential popularity may tap slightly different attitudes or may be more (or less) sensitive to changes in public attitudes toward the president" (p.215). As a result, favorability ratings and specific questions about personality traits, such as honesty or judgment, may help us hone in on other aspects of presidential evaluations—a strategy utilized in the current project.

Beyond such theoretical problems, researchers have also raised methodological concerns regarding the job approval measure (Jones, 1994). Some of these include the sensitivity of the instrument, the extent to which it is an objective measure of popularity, its tendency to aggregate voters, and its heavy reliance on the Gallup poll (Zukin & Carter, 1982). In addition, a methodological obstacle not widely elaborated in the literature (but certainly pertinent) is determining the proper time lag to measure effects from the various factors, whether they be short-term (war), long-term (economic conditions), or both (media). Pinpointing the proper time lag to locate relationships is paramount because "there is always the danger that a causal effect will 'dissipate' over time if the researcher waits too long to measure it" (Chaffee, 1972, p.8).

Specific to press influence, agenda setting theory sheds some light on this matter by suggesting that it takes approximately four to seven weeks for people's perceptions to change in response to fluctuations in media coverage (Winter & Eyal, 1981; Salwen, 1988), though this issue remains largely unresolved. For example, Wanta (1997a), in a meta-analysis that focused on differences in agenda setting effects among different media channels (print and broadcast), encountered scholarship documenting effects with time-lags ranging from a few days to six months. Meanwhile, Kepplinger et al. (1989) found that time lags of three months produce significant changes in public opinion. Consequently, this examination will integrate numerous lags to deal with the time problem but only to the point where they do not greatly hinder proper sample size.

At this juncture, we have confirmed the necessity of widening the conceptualization of presidential evaluations beyond the domain of simple job approval. Nevertheless, a more detailed consideration of the political evaluation process is required. Primarily, theories that navigate the relationship between mass media and public opinion of politicians are especially helpful. Thus, priming, agenda setting, and attitude change theories are now explained to converge on how media coverage of political scandals shapes people's impressions of the president.

Priming

On a broad level, priming theory claims that media establish the standards that people employ to judge public officials (e.g., Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Iyengar et al., 1982). As a consequence, priming theory is an invaluable asset for deepening our understanding of how media influence may operate during political scandals, such as the Monica Lewinsky affair. Miller & Krosnick (1997), for instance, assert that

> News media coverage of national policy issues...presumably affects evaluations of the president's general performance because all these issues touch on domains of presidential responsibility. Coverage of such issues may also sometimes affect evaluations of presidential character, but probably not as much as it affects presidential performance evaluations...News media coverage of national policy issues probably has even less impact on evaluations of a president's integrity, except when an issue is scandalous in nature (p.262, emphasis added).

This implicit distinction between personal assessments and performance evaluations hints that media attention to scandalous political stories may have divergent consequences on performance and personal ratings—a question pursued in this examination.

In addition to simple attention to a topic, there are other factors that mediate priming effects. Miller & Krosnick (1997) maintain that priming effects are more pronounced for people with high knowledge of politics. Further, the specificity of a story will govern the degree to which people employ the guidelines communicated in that story to appraise politicians (Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Therefore, because the current presidential impeachment scandal has been displayed in more concrete terms (about specific people and events) in the news, we might expect some shift in public impressions of the presidency, although not necessarily on job approval.

While priming is instrumental for outlining particular aspects of press influence on people's judgments about public officials, it is somewhat limited because much of the research has been experimental (i.e., artificial) and has usually probed television news instead of other media outlets. The larger theory of agenda setting bridges this gap by scrutinizing television and newspaper reporting patterns. The affiliation between agenda setting and priming is natural because "priming is really an extension of agenda-setting, and addresses the impact of news coverage on the weight assigned to specific issues in making political judgments" (Iyengar & Simon, 1993, p.250). Thus, agenda setting should further enhance our ability to sketch out how the public perceives politicians via mass media, especially with its recent expansion into the "second-level" (McCombs & Estrada, 1997).

Agenda-Setting & Salience

In its original conception, agenda setting theory posited that media controlled the priority of salient issues in public opinion (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Specifically, the inventory of topics stressed by mainstream news organizations in their media texts corresponded to the hierarchy of "most important problems" nominated by people in public opinion surveys (Funkhouser, 1973). Of course, many factors mediate the size of agenda setting effects, such as education level (Wanta, 1997b), political interest (Erbring et al., 1980), and voter need for orientation (Weaver, 1977).[1] The need for orientation concept is particularly insightful for clarifying how public opinion may not be adversely affected by news about political scandals because people do not always have a pressing need or desire to attend to the media frenzy. Although the early research in agenda setting mainly concentrated on issues, candidate images have also been examined (e.g., Weaver et al., 1981), particularly the president (Wanta, 1992; Wanta et al, 1989)—a research stream relevant to the current project.

Contemporary historical reviews of agenda setting delineate the process on two levels (McCombs et al., 1997b). At the first level, the degree of importance placed on an "object" (e.g., an issue, candidate, product, or whatever) by the media more or less influences the degree of prominence that "object" will receive in the public arena. At the second level, the "attributes" of objects emphasized in the media become central "attributes" in public conceptions of those same "objects" (McCombs & Evatt, 1995). An attribute can be thought of as a property, quality, or characteristic that describes an object (McCombs & Ghanem, 1998). In addition to modifying attribute salience, press emphasis on certain attributes is also believed to provide "compelling arguments" for audiences to alter their public concern about objects themselves (Ghanem, 1996, 1997).

The evidence for the transfer of attribute salience from press to the public is growing (e.g., Benton & Frazier, 1976; Takeshita & Mikami, 1993; King, 1997), although it is not an unqualified media effect. Ordinarily, attributes have been designated as either substantive (cognitively grounded) or affective (emotionally grounded)--(e.g., Ghanem, 1997). The extent to which either type of attribute shifts public opinion is still a matter of controversy, but some literature suggests that affective characteristics may exert more influence (e.g., McCombs et al., 1997a).

Agenda Setting & Attitude Change

The transfer of salience from the press to the public is the core mechanism operating in the agenda setting process. Though salience remains important, an implicit assumption in agenda setting (that has received more attention recently) is that influencing an object's salience through attribute emphasis can partially shape public attitudes about that object as well (e.g., McCombs, & Shaw, 1993; McCombs et al., 1997). For example, McCombs & Estrada (1997) state that the Bernard Cohen's classic summary of the agenda-setting function of the press should be reformulated to say "the media may not only tell us what to think about, they also may tell us how and what to think about it, and even what to do about it" (p. 247; emphasis added). Of course, we must recognize that attitude change by no means occurs for all people in all cases as has been shown ad nauseum in research (e.g., Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Hovland et al., 1953; Lazarsfeld et al., 1948); however, it is still necessary to explore how the process works if we are to further deepen the conceptualization of second-level agenda setting.

One weakness with the current explication of second-level agenda setting is that it does not supply a theoretical map indicating how media emphasis on attributes might influence attitudes. For example, a vital question encompasses whether press emphasis on attributes can impact attitudes directly or must it first be mediated by affecting salience? To address this question, we must first scan some of the attitude change research that has permeated the field since its inception.

Some of the more current persuasion research illustrates that salience (a.k.a. comprehension or learning) is integral to attitude change (e.g., Zaller, 1997) in some scenarios, but in others, it is not (e.g., McGuire, 1985). In fact, Petty & Priester (1994) argue that "the existing evidence shows that message comprehension and learning can occur in the absence of attitude change, and that a person's attitudes can change without learning the specific information in the communication" (p. 97). This leads us to ask how can we explicitly chart out the possible impact of second-level agenda setting on attitudes given these apparently conflicting observations?

The attitude change perspective that seems best equipped to handle this question is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) because it proposes that media messages can transform attitudes with or without changing salience, depending on the circumstances (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; 1986). Specifically, two routes of persuasion exist that shape attitudes: *central* and *peripheral*. With the central route, people's attitudes are impacted by a high degree of cognitive activity, thereby suggesting that salience precedes attitude change. Conversely, the peripheral route of persuasion occurs when "simple cues in the persuasion context influence attitudes" (Petty & Priester, 1994, p. 101). Personal relevance has been identified as a driving force behind which path is likely to occur in people's minds (Burnkrant & Unnava, 1989), although several other variables are meaningful, including perceptions of credibility, liking, and consensus (O'Keefe, 1990). If attitude change does occur at all, a central route transpires when people perceive media messages as high in personal relevance, while a peripheral route functions when media messages are deemed low in personal relevance.

Returning to second-level agenda setting, the ELM model would infer that media emphasis on attributes can modify salience and subsequently attitudes in some cases, or can influence attitudes directly in others, depending on how personally relevant people perceive the media messages to be. In the case of the Monica Lewinsky scandal then, logic dictates that a peripheral route seems more likely because, according to several media outlets, public opinion polls showed that people did not deem the investigation highly relevant (e.g., Berke & Elder, 1998; Grier & Thurman, 1998; Balz & Marcus, 1998). If this is true, we might also dub this as a "compelling arguments" hypothesis (Ghanem, 1997) because attribute salience in the media would be conjectured to be directly connected to shifts in public attitudes about an object, similar to its postulated link to object salience (Ghanem, 1996). Nevertheless, because we are at an early stage in the evolution of research tying agenda setting to attitude change, we must consider both central and peripheral routes plausible in this investigation (to be discussed in the next section).

It is indeed ironic that agenda setting, which was initially conceived as a research stream in response to the limited effects model regarding attitude change (Lasorsa, 1997), is now coming full circle to address the question of attitude change that sparked its origin. As a result, one of the key goals in this study was to empirically test how the media's attribute agenda is connected to public attitudes by examining how press emphasis on the Monica Lewinsky scandal is linked to public evaluations of the presidency. In short, this study explored traditional agenda-setting influence on salience but also transcended its conventional boundaries into the sphere of attitudes.

Putting it All Together

In relation to the current project, the conceptual framework offered by merging second-level agenda setting, priming, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model then enables us to better grasp the dynamics of how media coverage of the presidency might affect public opinion. This model is more expansive than other theoretical maps because it submits that press attention to a story can transform both overall opinions of the presidency on the first level (e.g., job approval or favorability) and on perceptions about specific dimensions of the presidency on the second level (e.g., personality traits). In order to depict exactly how the model operates in the current study, Figure 1 is displayed below.

- - - Figure 1 Here - - -

For the present study then, we might think of journalistic attention to the Monica Lewinsky story as an *attribute* of the broader coverage of Bill Clinton (the *object*). When probing the influence of this story on perceptions of personality traits, we are testing the bottom horizontal path of influence. Meanwhile, when probing the effects of this story on job approval, we are testing the diagonal or "compelling arguments" path of influence for salience. When exploring the direct path from attributes to favorability, we are looking at a peripheral route of persuasion. Finally, when tracing the path of media influence to favorability via job approval, we are looking at a central route of persuasion. Ideally, all paths should be investigated, but time and data constraints compelled us to only examine these four paths. Unfortunately, methodological procedures cannot always accommodate conceptual explications. Nonetheless, our approach should be sufficient in an exploratory study such as this, yet we still wanted to acknowledge the study's limitations up-front.

For the purposes of this project, job approval was probably more of a salience measure because it is purported to monitor performance (substantive) and is certainly more of a cognitive measure since the salience of issues has been linked to fluctuations in job approval (e.g., Brody, 1991). Alternatively, favorability was probably more closely linked to attitudes because it seems to represent more of a personal assessment of the president (affective). Even though job approval is not a precise measure of "salience" because it entails both emotional and cognitive perceptions, we argue that this substitution was necessary because no standard salience question exists for politicians as it does for issues—i.e., the Gallup "most important problem" questions (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). On the other hand, favorability appears to be more clearly associated to attitudes. As a result, a noteworthy contribution that this analysis can make is to assess the value of using these measures in media analyses of the presidency.

Agenda Setting Across Media Channels

A final question that agenda setting theory raises is how did different media channels covering the Monica Lewinsky affair affect public opinion. In particular, which medium (newspapers of television) wielded more influence? As referred to earlier, priming theory's concentration on broadcast news suggests that television might be stronger (e.g., Miller & Krosnick, 1997). In agenda setting, the evidence is somewhat more mixed. For example, Wanta (1997a) reasons that "no clear trend emerges from the comparison of the studies on the magnitude of agenda-setting effects across media" (p.148). Still, the bulk of agenda-setting work appears to verify stronger effects for newspapers (Benton & Frazier, 1976; Schoenbach, 1982; Weaver, 1977). Indeed, Protess & McCombs (1991) articulate that "most studies that compare different media find that newspapers are more likely to produce issue salience" (p.98). As a result, since most agenda-setting work has found such a trend for issue salience, we suspect a similar pattern to surface for public opinion of the presidency as measured by job approval and favorability.

By synthesizing the tenets of agenda setting, priming, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model of attitude change, we tested how media coverage of the Monica Lewinsky scandal was connected to fluctuations in public opinion of the presidency.

Hypotheses & Research Questions

A series of hypotheses and research questions were formulated based on the previous literature review. Anchored in the priming and agenda setting literature that has depicted a hierarchical relationship between mass media coverage of politics and public opinion, the following hypothesis is posed:

H1: Changes in public opinion about the president will be more strongly linked to media coverage preceding public opinion polls than to simultaneous or subsequent media coverage.

Based on the agenda-setting scholarship reporting a stronger relationship between newspapers and public opinion than for television and public opinion (e.g., Schoenbach, 1982), the following hypothesis is offered:

H2: Newspapers will be more strongly linked to public opinion shifts than television coverage.

Based on our discussion of presidential evaluations, priming, attitude change, and second-level agenda setting, the following research questions are submitted:

RQ1: Will media attention to the Monica Lewinsky scandal will be correlated with shifts in public opinion about presidential attributes?

RQ2: Will changes in overall public opinion about the president be uniform or divergent with regard to favorability and job approval?

RQ3: Will any observed attitude change best be characterized by a peripheral or central route of persuasion?

RQ4: How strongly associated will media coverage be with public evaluations of the president when integrating the impact of other factors?

Method

Sample

A longitudinal time-series design was employed to track the impact of media coverage on public opinion. Media content and public opinion surveys were monitored from Jan. 19-Nov 1., 1998. This beginning date was selected simply because it was the first week that the Monica Lewinsky story appeared in elite media. The Nov. 1 end date was more of a subjective decision but was made because the coverage ensuing the 1998 elections held on Nov. 3 largely focused on the upcoming impeachment hearings, which we believed would confound the effects of the original story and therefore, damage the study's validity. Furthermore, election day seemed like a natural point to complete such an investigation. The time increment utilized for this project was one week, simultaneously permitting precise measurement of time-lags and generating an adequate sample of weeks (N=41).

Media Content

A content analysis of *New York Times* newspapers and *ABC World News Tonight* broadcasts was performed to gauge media attention to the Monica Lewinsky scandal. These two news organizations were chosen because they are prime examples of elite, national media outlets (e.g., Zhu & Boroson, 1997; Dearing & Rogers, 1996). The following search strings were used in the Lexis / Nexis database to collect the total sample of stories. For the *New York Times* (n=282 stories), an example search string looked like this: "date is aft jan. 18 1998 and bef Nov. 2 1998 and section a or section 1 and page 1 and president or clinton and lewinsky." A similar search string was used for *ABC* news (n=187 stories). Simple frequencies were employed to determine the volume of media coverage per week (unit of analysis), a technique found to be fairly reliable by other scholars (e.g., Stone & McCombs, 1981).

Before continuing, it should be noted that several steps were taken to strengthen the study's validity and reliability. First, articles had to appear on the front page of the *New York Times* to ensure they were prominently displayed. Such a procedure was not utilized for *ABC World News Tonight* content because the intrinsic time-constraint of television news predetermines that the stories inserted in the daily broadcasts were the "most important" of the day. Further, the number of stories from each news outlet becomes more balanced when comparing content in this manner. Second, the use of general rather than specific key words was intentional, allowing us to obtain an aggregate measure of the story's impact. Finally, coder reliability was assessed on a subsample of the stories by having an independent human coder validate the sample collected by Lexis / Nexis. Holsti's intercoder reliability figures for the subsample was 88 percent.[2] While not perfect, we believe the sample of stories collected from both news organizations functioned as a fairly representative portrayal of how mass media reported the scandal.

Public Opinion

To measure perceptions about the presidency, composite indices of several public opinion polls were created. This was an integral step for securing an appropriate sample of surveys. As touched on in the theoretical section, second level agenda setting served as the core conceptual framework for this study. Thus, object salience had to be operationally defined (*first-level*). Object salience was gauged by presidential job approval as scored by ABC News/Washington Post, CNN/Time, FOX, and Gallup polls (alpha=.96). These numbers represent the percentage of people who "approve" of the job the president is doing in running the country.[3] Beyond object salience, public attitudes towards to presidency also had to be operationally defined. In this instance, public attitudes were calibrated by presidential favorability ratings as scored by ABC News/Washington Post, CBS/New York Times, CNN/Time, and Gallup polls (alpha=.91). These numbers stand for the percentage of people who have a "favorable" opinion of the president in general.[4]

In addition to *first-level* measures, it was imperative that we operationalize attribute salience (*second-level*) as well. Gallup poll questions about the president's personal characteristics acted as the attribute salience variables because other data that might be conceptualized in this way were scant. Due to the scarcity of this data (n=3 to n=5), no distinction was made between substantive and affective attributes, yet future research should probably integrate this dichotomy into similar analyses. Moreover, the problems with this data forced us to only examine one of the peripheral and central paths of persuasion. Nevertheless, confirmation or rejection of those paths will shed some light on the matter of attitude change in second-level agenda setting. The particular qualities measured for the study were honesty, competence, and judgment.[5]

Time Lags

As outlined earlier, it was essential that we test for relationships at multiple time-lags to locate any potential linkages between press attention and public conceptions of the president. Though the range of optimal time-lags has varied in research (e.g., Winter & Eyal, 1981; Jablonski & Hester, 1998), a six-week window was adopted for this study for two key reasons: (1) most scholarship detects at least some relationship within this amount of time (e.g., Salwen, 1988; Zucker, 1978; Wanta & Hu, 1994); and (2) venturing beyond this boundary impairs sample size to the point where statistical reliability could become a problem. While we surmised that media influence would precede changes in public opinion, there was always the possibility that they would move synchronously or that public opinion swings would precede shifts in media coverage. As a result, a six-week time-lag was utilized in two directions to ensure that all three types of relationships could be observed.

Data Analysis

Pearson cross-lagged correlations were calculated to ascertain whether a linkage existed between media coverage of the scandal and public opinion of the presidency, except when sample size was small in which case Spearmann rho correlations were used (i.e., for attribute salience). McCall (1994) recommends such nonparametric tests when dealing with smaller sample sizes. When suitable, multivariate techniques (partial correlations) were employed to analyze a number of variables concomitantly.

The study's research design allowed us to efficiently test the hypotheses and explore the research questions. To test Hypothesis 1, for example, the number and size of correlations revealed whether media coverage moved public opinion, they moved together, or public opinion led media coverage. Likewise, for Hypothesis 2, the number and size of correlations also exposed which news channel was more closely related to fluctuations in public opinion.

Correlations between media coverage and Gallup poll data on presidential characteristics addressed Research Question 1. Research Question 2 was investigated by scrutinizing the general direction of first-level correlations. For Research Question 3, we examined the direct relationship between media coverage and attitudes to test the peripheral path of persuasion. Subsequently, we tested whether the influence of media coverage on public salience mediated the relationship between press coverage and perceived favorability (via partial correlations), thereby exploring a central route of persuasion. In the words, we checked if the relationship between media coverage and attitude change could remain strong when the impact of media coverage on public salience was removed. Lastly, partial correlations demonstrated how well press attention to the Monica Lewinsky story was connected to public assessments of the president in the face of other factors (time and economic indicators) for Research Question 4.[6]

Results

H1: Changes in public opinion about the president will be more strongly linked to media coverage preceding public opinion polls than to simultaneous or subsequent media coverage.

The findings support Hypothesis 1 for favorability and moderately support it for job approval. Media coverage appears to precede shifts in public opinion with more frequency than public opinion swings precede changes in press attention (or fluctuate synchronously). Tables 1 and 2 are presented below summarizing the data.

- - - Insert Table 1 Here - - -

- - - Insert Table 2 Here - - -

For presidential favorability, the ratio of significant ($p<.05$) cross-lagged correlations with media coverage preceding public opinion changes to correlations with media coverage changes following public opinion shifts is 2 to 0. For job approval, the evidence is more mixed because no correlations reach statistical significance, although the relationship between media coverage three weeks prior to public opinion polls does approach significance ($r=.29$; $p<.10$). On the whole then, it seems that media coverage precedes changes in public assessments of the presidency.

H2: Newspapers will be more strongly linked to public opinion shifts than television coverage.

The data are mixed with regard to this hypothesis for favorability but appears to be modestly supported for job approval. Referring back to Table 1, newspaper and television coverage are both substantially connected to public opinion in one instance each, thereby making their influence appear shared. When taking into account the size and significance level of the cross-lagged correlations, television is slightly stronger, but the difference is so minute that we conclude their influence to be equal for favorability. However, more definitive generalizations about the effects of different media channels cannot be drawn until we look at the correlations for job approval.

A different image emerges from the job approval data. Returning the Table 2, the only noteworthy correlation ($p<.10$) occurs for newspapers, hinting that this was the more influential medium. Nevertheless, the lack of significance shows the relationship is not all that strong. Generally then, it seems that newspapers and television both play strong complementary roles with respect to favorability, but newspaper coverage is marginally more related to job approval shifts.

RQ1: Will media attention to the Monica Lewinsky scandal will be correlated with shifts in public opinion about presidential attributes?

Before presenting these results, it should be remembered that the sample sizes for the findings on presidential attributes were extremely small (between n=3 to n=5) due to scarce data availability, making all those correlations highly tentative. Therefore, we recommend that these findings only be used to suggest whether a relationship exists or not, and certainly nothing should be extrapolated about the direction of such linkages.

Similar to overall judgments about the president, the data imply that a relationship operates between press attention to political scandals and people's perceptions about a government official's personal characteristics. Unlike general assessments of the presidency, the relationship seems to be more reciprocal and shared. Tables 3, 4, and 5 reflect these trends.

- - - Insert Table 3 Here - - -

- - - Insert Table 4 Here - - -

- - - Insert Table 5 Here - - -

Collectively, it appears there are connections between media coverage and public perceptions of presidential competence, honesty, and judgment. The mixture of positive and negative correlations is confusing but could probably be explained had we accounted for tone in the study's content analysis. Regardless, these data lend some credence to second-level agenda setting and priming effects, although additional research should be executed to confirm these associations.

RQ2: Will changes in overall public opinion about the president be uniform or divergent with regard to favorability and job approval?

According to Tables 1 & 2, it seems that the shifts in public opinion of the president move in divergent directions when responding to press coverage of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Specifically, favorability appears to be negatively linked (all significant correlations are negative), while job approval seems to be positively associated (the one meaningful correlations is positive). In addition, the general direction of favorability correlations is negative, while job approval correlations are positive. Hence, higher press scrutiny of the scandal was related to negative perceptions of favorability but was associated to positive opinions about job performance. The divergent trends demonstrate that presidential evaluations are multidimensional—a point to be further considered in the subsequent section.

RQ3: Will any observed attitude change best be characterized by a peripheral or central route of persuasion?

Findings suggest that the observed public attitude change in the Monica Lewinsky scandal is best characterized by a peripheral route of persuasion. To answer this research question, we converged on the time-point when media attention to the scandal was connected to a shift in public attitudes (perceived favorability at time-lag 6). As stated for Hypothesis 1, zero-order correlations between media coverage six weeks prior to changes in perceived favorability are both significant (ABC News r=-.54, p<.01; NYT r=-.47, p<.05). Thus, a peripheral (direct) path of attitude change appears plausible here, but we still needed to look for intervening variables.

Two partial correlation coefficients (for television and newspapers), which removed the impact of press coverage on job approval (i.e., public salience), were computed to deal with this problem. If the correlations decreased, this would imply that public salience mediates the relationship between media coverage of attributes and shifts in public attitudes. Alternatively, if the correlations remained stable or increased, this would verify a more direct relationship.[7] Specifically, we controlled for the influence of media coverage on job approval at lag 3 and 6: lag 3 because it was the only point when media impact on salience approached statistical significance; and lag 6 because it represented the period that coincided with public attitude change. Ideally, we would have liked to control for the influence of all prior media coverage on public salience but could not because sample size became a concern when integrating all lags.

In both cases, the correlations remained stable (ABC News r=-.59, p<.01; NYT r=-.55, p<.05). Accordingly, a peripheral route of persuasion appears more likely than a central route for explaining observed attitude change during the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

RQ4: How strongly associated will media coverage be with public evaluations of the president when integrating the impact of other factors?

Here, we converged on the time points when media coverage were most influential (at time lag –6 for favorability and time lag 3 for job approval), allowing us to comprehensively scrutinize this phenomenon. To review, time and economic indicators (Consumer Price Index and Consumer Confidence) were employed as control variables because of their known influence on presidential assessments (Simonton, 1987; Stimson, 1976). Partial correlations (controlling for time, Consumer Confidence, and the Consumer Price Index) report that the relationship between media coverage and public opinion is robust for favorability (ABC News r=-.42, p<.05; NYT r=-.40, p<.10) but weak for job approval (NYT r=-.03, n.s.). Therefore, it seems that media coverage remains strongly associated to public assessments of the presidency in terms of valence but not salience.

Discussion

Methodological Concerns

Prior to discussing the implications of this research, it would be helpful to enumerate some of its methodological shortcomings. One caveat was that the public opinion data were extracted from many different sources and may not be comparable. Nevertheless, this step was necessary to obtain an adequate sample of surveys. Further, the high alpha reliability scores (alpha>.90) demonstrated that the surveys were essentially chronicling parallel trends and could be aggregated legitimately. Another concern entailed the small sample of data for monitoring public opinion about presidential attributes. Again, this was inevitable given the dearth of this type of data. While the sample is small, our tentative approach in drawing generalizations enabled this study to function as pretest for future empirical work in this area and is valuable in this capacity. A related concern involves our failure to directly compare all central and peripheral routes of persuasion, but this initial look at attitudes in second-level agenda setting, at least, hints at which route is more feasible. Finally, the use of only front-page newspaper stories and national television newscasts affords a constrained view of the wide ranging media content available for the Monica Lewinsky scandal. On the other hand, this strategy supplied a manageable sample of data and isolated salient news. Consequently, it was appropriate for an exploratory study such as this.

Implications & Conclusions

There are many directions future researchers might embark upon in light of the current findings, especially in the fields of mass communication and political science. The fact that media coverage led shifts in public opinion reveals that press attention to governmental scandals shapes public opinion of politicians. Though many pundits dismissed such influence, the current project illustrates that researchers must be willing to look beyond the short-term trends in public opinion that media and Washington elites expect. Thus, this study confirms the utility of time-series designs. While causality cannot be demonstrated, such approaches are crucial for detecting important relationships because of their rigorous and systematic nature. Had we only adopted a cross-sectional scheme, we would have deduced that media influence was minimal and erred in the same way as countless Washington and media pundits. As a consequence, researchers would be wise to further explore how media coverage of scandals is connected to public opinion in other settings, implementing time-series designs, to either verify or disprove the patterns documented in this study.

The mutual impact of newspaper and television coverage on favorability is pertinent because it implies a more complementary relationship between media channels on public attitudes during political scandals. On the other hand, the minimal association evident between newspaper coverage and job approval conforms more to a traditional agenda-setting model with newspapers wielding more influence. The discrepancy in the results may lie in the fact that our hypothesis was grounded in agenda setting (which focuses on salience), but favorability is more of an attitude. Consequently, the agenda-setting model worked better for the salience measure (job approval) than for the attitude measure (favorability). By building on the findings of the current investigation, future work may want to further concentrate on the differences in medium impact for political scandals with respect to attitudes and cognitions. Moreover, expanding such work into the realm of radio and the Internet is paramount for understanding the dynamics of how different media inform people's impressions about political scandals.

As asserted earlier, the findings grant some support to the notion of second-level agenda setting. Further, the influence of media coverage on presidential evaluations mounts evidence for priming and attitude change as well. The theoretical model advanced herein affords a framework for subsequent research to continue and explicate the process. For example, the hybrid use of ELM, priming, and second-level agenda setting helps explain why a peripheral route to attitude change was not surprising given the low levels of personal relevance that the public exhibited toward the story. Therefore, future inquiries should probe how different types of media coverage shape both overall impressions about politicians and perceptions of their personal attributes. Isolating what exact aspects of Executive images are likely to be affected by press coverage is important for both scholars and political consultants alike. Combining such research with traditional agenda-setting scholarship on issue salience will supply a more holistic image of how news forms social reality.

The divergent linkages among press scrutiny, favorability, and job approval expose that presidential evaluations are multifaceted. We account for the divergent findings by arguing that job approval is more of a substantive (cognitive) evaluation, while favorability is more of an affective (valence) judgment (as described in the literature review). In terms of comparing substantive and affective elements, the stronger impact on favorability shows that the effects of attribute salience on attitudes deserve more scrutiny. In addition, it demonstrates the necessity of further bridging the ELM and second-level agenda setting models to better sketch out this process. Political scientists and mass communication scholars should begin examining both dimensions of public assessments (cognitions & attitudes). Limiting research to only one half of the equation precludes theoretical advancement of candidate image scholarship.

The ability of media coverage to foster some changes in public assessments of the president, even in multivariate analyses, corroborates the statistical findings of other researchers (e.g., Brody, 1991. However, the weakness of media influence on perceived job approval shows that this pattern only occurs in some cases. It is imperative that analysts continue to employ multivariate research designs because the relationships among media, government, and the public are so highly complicated and intertwined that many relationships will go unnoticed without such methods.

In sum, it is hoped that this project established the value of monitoring media coverage of political scandals for better understanding how public assessments of government officials are cast.

Notes

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[1] Voter need for orientation is comprised of three factors: "the degree of (1) interest in the message content; (2) uncertainty about the subject of the message; and (3) effort required to attend to the message (including the perceived likelihood that a reliable source of information is available" (Weaver, 1977, p.131).

[2] The subsample was comprised of every 10th story from *ABC News* and every 10th article from the *New York Times*.

[3] Normally, the question was worded in the following manner: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job as president?"

[4] The basic wording for the favorability questions was: "What is your overall opinion of Bill Clinton – is it favorable or unfavorable (or have you never heard of him)?" It should be noted though that the range of questions varied more for favorability than job approval.

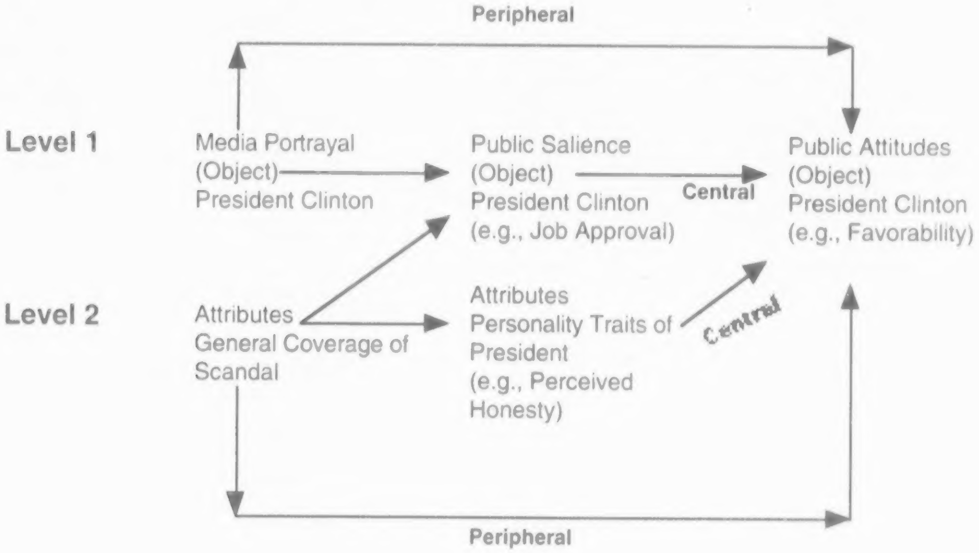
[5] Honesty, competence, and judgment questions were worded as follows. First interviewers said "I'm going to read off some personal characteristics and qualities. As I read each one, tell me if you think it strongly applies to Bill Clinton, somewhat applies, or doesn't apply. First...Next." The specific phrases were "can get things done," honest and trustworthy," and "shows good judgment." Gallup aggregated answers into "applies" / "does not apply" categories, which were utilized in the data analysis phase of this project.

[6] The specific economic indicators used were consumer confidence and the consumer price index in order to gauge both fiscal performance and perceptions of economic health.

[7] Hypothetically, a spurious correlation between variables a (media coverage) & b (public attitudes) might exist because both are correlated to a third variable c (public salience) that intervenes between the two (McCall, 1994). A partial correlation coefficient allows us to test how direct the relationship between variables a & b is. Thus, we can deduce whether a peripheral route of attitude change is more likely, based on the value of the correlation coefficient.

Figures & Tables

Figure 1: 1st & 2nd Level Agenda Setting for Monica Lewinsky Scandal


Peripheral
Level 1
Media Portrayal (Object) President Clinton
Public Salience (Object) President Clinton (e.g., Job Approval)
Central
Public Attitudes (Object) President Clinton (e.g., Favorability)
Level 2
Attributes General Coverage of Scandal
Attributes Personality Traits of President (e.g., Perceived Honesty)
Central
Peripheral

Note: Lines reflect possible paths of salience transfer and attitude influence.

Table 1: Cross-Lagged Correlations Between Media Covg. & Favorability of President

	Media Precedes P.O.							P.O. Precedes Media					
	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0 wk	1	2	3	4	5	6
ABC	-.54 **	-.12	.15	-.17	.10	.22	-.09	.01	.13	-.17	-.10	.07	.00
NYT	-.47 *	-.30	-.11	-.30	-.24	-.03	-.31	-.27	-.18	-.35	-.25	-.05	-.06

*p<.05

**p<.01

Note: Values represent the correlation between the number of stories about the Monica Lewinsky scandal and the percentage of people rating saying their overall opinion of Bill Clinton is favorable. Time lags are computed in one-week increments.

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Table 2: Cross-Lagged Correlations Between Media Covg. & Job Approval of President

	Media Precedes P.O.							P.O. Precedes Media					
	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0 wk	1	2	3	4	5	6
ABC	.11	.07	.20	.12	.15	.25	-.21	.-.14	-.09	-.11	.06	-.03	-.17
NYT	.24	.21	.21	.29 *	.21	.22	.05	-.18	-.08	-.10	-.01	-.02	-.02

*p<.10

Note: Values represent the correlation between the number of stories about the Monica Lewinsky scandal and the percentage of people rating saying they approve of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job as president. Time lags are computed in one-week increments.

Table 3: Cross-Lagged Spearmann Rho Correlations Between Media Covg. & Competence ("Can get things done")

	Media Precedes P.O.							P.O. Precedes Media					
	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0 wk	1	2	3	4	5	6
ABC	1 *	1 *	.87	.87	.5	-.32	-1 *	-.60	-.79	-.36	-.15	-.67	.11
NYT	.87	1 *	.5	.5	1 *	-.20	-.60	-.87 *	-.82	-.21	-.36	-.15	-.10

*p<.05

Note: Values represent the correlation between the number of stories about the Monica Lewinsky scandal and the percentage of people rating saying Bill Clinton can "get things done." Time lags are computed in one-week increments.

Table 4: Cross-Lagged Spearmann Rho Correlations Between Media Covg. & Honesty

	Media Precedes P.O.							P.O. Precedes Media					
	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0 wk	1	2	3	4	5	6
ABC	-.50	.00	-.5	-1 **	-1 **	.94 **	.05	.87 *	.50	-.10	-.22	-.15	.62
NYT	.5	.5	-.5	-1 **	-.87	.32	.21	.87 *	.60	-.10	-.21	-.36	-.10

*p<.05

Note: Values represent the correlation between the number of stories about the Monica Lewinsky scandal and the percentage of people rating saying Bill Clinton is "honest and trustworthy." Time lags are computed in one-week increments.

Table 5: Cross-Lagged Spearmann Rho Correlations Between Media Covg. & Judgment

	Media Precedes P.O.							P.O. Precedes Media					
	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0 wk	1	2	3	4	5	6
ABC	.50	.86	.5	-.5	-.5	.33	-.95 *	.00	-.32	-.95 *	-1 *	-.63	.32
NYT	1 *	1 *	.50	-.50	-.86	-.50	-.83	.00	.32	-.95 *	-1 *	-.50	-.63

*p<.05

Note: Values represent the correlation between the number of stories about the Monica Lewinsky scandal and the percentage of people rating saying Bill Clinton "shows good judgment." Time lags are computed in one-week increments.

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The presidential candidates in political cartoons: A reflection of cultural differences between the United States and Korea

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The presidential candidates in political cartoons: A reflection of cultural differences between the Untied States and Korea

Abstract

This study examines the content of political newspaper comics in presidential elections to compare the culture of the United States and Korea from three perspectives: (1) the context of communication, (2) individualism vs. collectivism, and (3) confrontation. It finds a clear difference between candidate images in the cartoons of America and Korea. These three dimensions were good indicators of cultural differences between Western and Asian society.

The presidential candidates in political cartoons: A reflection of cultural differences between the United States and Korea

1. Introduction

> *Whereas high art was brought to fruition under the patronage of church or princes, the flowering of caricature has its origins in popular art. We can learn a great deal more about the life of the people, their customs, their way of living, dress, and habits, from Holbein's woodcuts than from his paintings (Selz, 1976, p.11).*

The most popular feature in newspapers is comic strips. They offer humor, brightening a person's day. The comics are read by seventy-five percent of newspaper readers (Hughes, 1988, p.27). When editors at the *Houston Chronicle* polled readers about the comics, 20,000 readers responded. They paid their own postage, and many readers wrote long letters to the staffs (p. 27). This response reflects readers' strong interest in newspaper comics.

Political cartoons also work as an important source of information, retaining amazing freshness and eliciting an immediate response (Selz, 1976, p.12). They are visual commentaries on political angles and social satires with a cute punch. Political cartoons mirror a society's culture (Gower, 1995, p. 37).

One type of political cartoon is the caricature, a form of wit or satire usually having a moral purpose. Famous and notorious politicians become regular subjects in caricatures. For example, this study revealed that 43 percent of *USA Today* political cartoons in 1996 included caricatures of presidential candidates Bill Clinton, Bob Dole and Ross Perot. In the 1997 presidential election in Korea, *Chosunilbo*, a major paper, used caricatures of presidential candidates in its political satire comic strips every other day. Thus, media images of presidential candidates are significant because voters will probably not see the candidate in person and news coverage of presidential candidates is typically distorted or superficial – it tends to focus only on the "horse race" aspects of the campaigns (Patterson & McClure, 1976).

The presidential candidates in political cartoons: A reflection of cultural differences between the United States and Korea

Mutual communication among society's members forms their culture. Hall (1959) insists that culture and communication are inseparable and interrelated. His study also suggests a comprehensive conceptual design based on the notion that culture is communication and communication is culture. Hall (1977) defined cultural differences by distinguishing communicative characteristics as concepts of high- or low-context messages. In another study, Barnlund (1975) proposed that Americans are seen as spontaneous, talkative and verbally explicit, while Asians are seen as more reserved and introspective.

As mentioned earlier, it is also known that the mass media of a country mirrors its cultural values. Researchers have studied the diverse relationship between media content and the cultural traits of a society. Therefore, it can be assumed that newspaper political cartoons, an element of media content, also deliver not only various political contexts but also reflect socio-cultural trends. Furthermore, the contents of newspaper cartoons from different countries are significant because they can provide a framework to understand the cultural discourse of each society.

Therefore, this study examines the contents of political newspaper cartoons in presidential elections in order to compare the cultural aspects of political communications in the United States and Korea.

The history of political parties in Korea is relatively short compared to that of America. However, Korean political loyalties tend to be rooted in the geographic area in which the party originated, as opposed the policies the party espouses (Kim, 1998). As shown in Fig.1 (See Appendix), east and west regionalism has been the unsolved issue in Korean society. On the other hand, Americans are more interested in issues, policies and party platforms than in personalities and regionalism.

Several cross-cultural aspects of cartoons were adapted for this study. The first dimension studied is the difference between presidential images as portrayed in Korean and American political cartoons. This dimension is studied by adapting Graber and Weaver's presidential performance criteria. The second area studied is the tone of cartoons in Korea and America. It is expected that the tone of American cartoons will be more negative than Korean cartoons. The final dimension studied is orientation differences between political cartoons in the two countries. Based on the cultural traits of both countries, it is expected that Korean cartoons will be personality-oriented and American comics will be issue-oriented.

2. *Political Cartoons in Newspapers*

The earliest American political prints come, interestingly enough, from the hands of eminent political leaders, such as Benjamin Franklin's "Join or Die" of 1754, shown in many newspapers from Philadelphia to Boston, or Paul Revere's color engraving, "The Boston Massacre" of 1770, anti-British propaganda under the guise of a realistic rendering of the event. Franklin was a printer by trade. Revere was not only a silversmith but also an engraver (Selz, p.13).

American society then enjoyed an atmosphere in which political cartoons could flourish. Political caricatures, or cartoons, as they came to be known in the 19th century, were probable only after certain bases were achieved – basically, the widespread agreement of a norm of beauty and the mental freedom to detach the symbol from the reality of the person being satirized, ridiculed or castigated. In addition to these circumstances, there also had to exist a climate of political freedom, supported by political stability, that permitted artists or writers to engage in satire (Selz, p.12).

In the early 20th century, political cartoons in American newspapers overwhelmed their notorious and cynical satires in any subjects and events backgrounding the political freedom and the freedom of the press and the development of newspaper industry. Since Richard Outcalt's smiling street urchin, "The Yellow Kid," ran in 1896, comic strips and panels have become universal in American newspapers (Shaw, 1992, p. 4).

Yet, the renaissance of the political cartoon in America during the last twenty years was certainly unpredictable. The problems facing the cartoonist have been competition with visual media and the decline of print media (Selz, p.19). It seemed that the purpose and function of the political cartoon was a matter of the past. In the past, American daily newspapers commonly included pages full of comics. However, a new comics format is used to only illustrate events in modern newspapers.

Whereas political cartoons in American newspapers have declined, the political cartoons in Korean newspapers during the last ten years have enjoyed full freedom in choosing topics and objects. The main reason is the end of the military regime in 1987. Not only the front page but also the social sections of daily newspapers are dealing with current political issues without any political pressure and restriction. Korean newspaper readers also amuse themselves by reading comics that criticize current social problems.

On the other hand, political comics also help people understand the political fabric of their country. Politicians use political comics to gain insight and get feedback from the public. During the last Korean presidential election in 1997, Hoi Chang Lee, the leader of Grand National Party, used his caricatures instead of his pictures. He also delivered 150,000 cartoon packets titled "A man of integrity: Hoi Chang Lee," and "The life story of Hoi Chang Lee and his wife, In Wok Han" (Park and Jung, 28 Nov. 1997). Recently, President Kim published a cartoon book, "Opening the future with our people," to commemorate his first presidential anniversary (Kho and Shin, 2 Sep. 1998). Korean newspaper comics not only mirror the society but also serve as social surveillance of the mass media.

In the 1990s, newspaper comics still have the potential to attract readers of every age, although the number of comics has dropped as newspapers have been confronted with the rising cost of newsprint. The comics still reflect people's everyday lives (Astor ,1995, p.39). The potential influence of comics in society has become more extensive because of new formats including various interactive abilities in everything from print to audiotext comics (Zimmerman, 1997, p.20). Comic art, computer-generated graphics, Internet and audiotext telephone services and news photographs are used to illustrate American political cartoons (Levine, 1997, p.24). Not only do newspaper comics affect readers, but readers also influence newspaper comics.

3. Cross-cultural approach in the United States and Korea

Culture is not as much what people do and how they express themselves as their knowledge of the potential behaviors and cognitive maps of their in-group. Familiarity with certain forms of behavior and ways of thinking make people feel that they belong to a culture (Von Raffler-Engel, 1988). A broad definition of culture was noted by Levine (1973) who viewed culture as :

> An organized body of rules concerning the ways in which individuals in a population should communicate with one another, think about themselves and their environments and behave toward one another and toward objects in their environments. The rules are not universally or constantly obeyed, but they are recognized by all and they ordinarily operate to limit the range of variation in patterns of communication, belief, value and social behavior in that population. (p.4)

Society, social systems and culture are interrelated and impact communication. To understand similarities and differences in communication between cultures, it is necessary to have a way of talking about how cultures differ.

Gudykunst (1987) describes the variables by which cultures are different or similar as "dimensions of sociocultural variability." Sociocultural variability is influenced by two major factors: ecology (or resources) and history (Gudykunst, 1987). These dimensions of sociocultural variability affect the specific values and norms that predominate in different cultures. These values and norms also allow us to understand why patterns of communication are similar or different across cultural boundaries. Although there are many dimensions on which cultures differ, this study focuses on Hall's thought of high-and low-context culture and Hofstede's (1983) individualism versus collectivism. Also, Taylor, Miracle, and Chang (1994) cited confrontation as criteria for differentiating cultural distinctions between the West and the East.

(1) High-Context Communication versus Low-Context Communication:

Hall's (1977) high- and low-context notion focuses on cultural differences in communication. Hall (1976) described the difference between high- and low-context cultures in the following way:

> A high context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is already in the person, while very little is the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code.

Hall (1987) observed that the United States is characterized by a low-context culture, whereas Japan and Korea have relatively high-context cultures. Also, Yum (1987) noted the high value of reading nonverbal cues as being characteristic of the Korean culture. Kang (1988) and Gudykunst, Yoon and Nishida (1987) also pointed out the high-context nature of Korean culture, finding indirect and subtle communication to be preferred over the direct and blunt style more valued in the West. In a low-context culture, most information is contained in either explicit or verbal messages. Consequently, whereas Korean culture is a high-context culture, American culture is placed on the low-context culture (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992).

(2) Individualism versus Collectivism:

The characteristic of individualism or collectivism is the major dimension of cultural variability used to explain cross-cultural differences in behavior. Emphasis is placed on individual goals in individualistic cultures. Group goals have precedence over individualistic goals in collectivistic cultures (Tak, Kaid, and Lee, 1997).

Hoare and Pares (1988) indicated that Koreans highly value dependency. This is evidenced by Korean's willingness to rely more on extended families for emotional, social and economic support than Americans. Both Paik (1968) and Kim (1984,1985) also noted that individuals have not been the central unit of social life in traditional Korean society. Instead, a spirit of mutual assistance and cooperation among groups prevails, manifesting itself in cooperation among rural and urban dwellers. The Korean people are typically willing to "pitch in" for the good of their country.

Hofstede (1980, 1983) also compared the collectivistic nature of Japanese and Korean cultures to the United States. He noted that collectivistic cultures prefer "a tightly knit social structure in which individuals can expect other in-group persons to look after them." Collectivism implies dependence or interdependence, and individualism implies independence. In the United States, individualistic and independent behaviors are highly valued, whereas dependency often has a negative connotation.

(3) Confrontation:

Yum (1987) characterized the Korean communication style as being "accommodation-oriented" as opposed to confrontation-oriented. Paik (1968) and others have also noted that the traditional face-to-face consciousness of Koreans makes confrontation in social interaction generally unpleasant. Hall and Hewitt (1973) suggest that Americans regard communication as a tool for conflict resolution. The Korean view, however, holds that communication is of limited value in solving problems because truth and solutions become apparent in the natural course of events. Thus, Korean people tend to avoid confrontation. In general, Koreans are more emotion-oriented than Americans, who place greater emphasis on rationality.

4. Other studies of media coverage in presidential elections

Hacker, et. al. (1996, p.143) studied the use of computer-mediated political communication in the 1992 presidential campaign . They found that the reasons voters used computer lists for presidential candidates in 1992 were: (a) to state opinions about the election. (b) to convey information about their personal lives and voting aims, and (c) to announce information about the campaign. The Perot list was found to include more opinion statements than the other two lists. The Clinton list contained the most information, including personal facts.

Graber and Weaver (1996, p. 24) also analyzed the presidential election in 1992 . They classified a list of print media terms that were used to depict the three candidates in election campaign stories. They found that 40 percent of the characterizations mentioned the overall political doctrine of the candidates, which were liberal, conservative or moderate. Little mention was made of candidates' backgrounds, intellect, motives, styles of leadership, or how they handled communications, decision-making and management functions.

In addition, the two terms that had the highest story counts were "strong," which referred to the power of candidates, and "trust," which referred to the personal quality of being faithful. "Strong" accounted for 26 percent and "trust" accounted for 25 percent of the most frequently used terms. Finally, "failure," a term used mainly to describe the Bush campaign and presidency, accounted for nine percent of the most frequently used terms (pp. 27-28).

Kim (1998) studied Korean voting manners in the 1997 national election. He found that the candidates' political party affiliations, which is the rational, was included in the irrational aspect for evaluating the candidates. This study shows that Korean people tend to depend on candidates' personal orientations, not issues.

Tak, Kaid and Lee (1997) studied cross-cultural dimensions of political advertising in the United States and Korea. Based upon cultural differences in the two countries, it was concluded that Korean candidates rely significantly less on direct negative ads than U.S. candidates. Their findings indicate that political advertising messages by American and Korean candidates were highly reflective of their cultural orientations. Political advertising, therefore, was a conspicuous indicator of cultural values because it reflected clear differences in American and Korean cultural patterns.

Graber and Weaver (1996, p.7) developed a list of performance criteria by which to predict or attribute the success or defeat of presidencies (see Table 1). Using these criteria, they analyzed the content of eight newspapers and three magazines in America. They found that magazines and newspapers focused more heavily on judging the motives and personalities of candidates than on inquiring into the candidates' backgrounds, intellects, relationships, communication styles, political styles, decision-making styles or management skills. Bill Clinton's "honesty" was referred to a total of 93 times, and his "patriotism" was referred to 89 times. The most repeated term used about George Bush was "national loyalty." The next terms were "family" and "traditional values." The most frequently used term for judging Ross Perot was "crusading personality," and there were 19 references to "ambition" as the basis of his motivation (p. 23).

Table 1. Presidential Performance Criteria (p.20-21)

Criteria	Biographical Adjectives
Background	Religious, Educated, Ethical, Career Politician, Disciplined
Intellect	Observant, Intelligent, Knowledgeable, Analytical
Motivation	Patriotic, Freedom, Competitive, Family/Traditional Values,
Personality	Crusading, Commanding, Responsible, Optimistic, Humble,
Relationships	Isolated, Diplomatic, Compassionate
Communication Style	Elitist, Populist, Eloquent, Image Builder
Leadership Skill	Inspirational, Compromising, Charismatic, Persuasive
Political Style	Conciliatory, Pragmatic, Reformer, Moralistic, Coalition Builder
Decision Style	Indecisive, Realistic, Passive, Imaginative
Management Skills	Delegating, Accountable, Competent, Efficient

6. Research hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to determine the differences between presidential images in the political cartoons of Korea and America. A content analysis will accomplish a cross-cultural comparative analysis. Based upon the assumption of cultural differences between the two countries such as low- and high-context communication, individualism versus collectivism, and confrontation, both countries' images of presidential candidates in newspaper cartoons will be compared. The following hypotheses are presented.

Several researchers such as Hoare and Pares (1988), Paik (1968), Kim(1984,1985), Hofstede (1980,1983), Tak, Kaid and Lee (1997) concluded that Korean culture is collective-oriented and American culture is individual-oriented. Based on this premise, the first group of hypotheses is made. The categories for more detailed analysis are adapted from Graber and Weaver's presidential performance criteria (see Table 1).

> Hypothesis 1-a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i,j. Korean newspaper cartoons will be different from American cartoons in terms of presidential candidates' background, intellect, motivation, personality, relationships, communication style, leadership style, political style, decision style and management skills.

The second hypothesis is based on Hall's (1977) cultural differentiation between communication contexts. The U.S. is characterized by low-context communication. Low-context communication individuals are more able to disconnect the debate from the persons involved – they can scream and shout out a controversy and yet remain good friends afterward. In the high-context culture, the difference is heavily linked to the person who causes the contention. To disagree with somebody in public is an extreme insult. Especially when communicating in a boss-subordinate relationship, individuals are expected to show mutual sensitivity appropriate to the rituals surrounding senior-junior relations (Mooij & Keegan, 1991).

Whereas the content of American newspaper contents is expected to express conflict or open dissatisfaction about presidential candidates, Korean newspaper comics are expected to reflect their high-context culture and describe presidential candidates more indirectly.

> Hypothesis 2. American newspaper cartoons will use a more negative tone in presenting presidential candidates' images than will Korean political cartoons.

Digital thinking and decision-making are features of the American communication system. Whereas Americans are structural and analytical, Koreans are involved in recognizing the feeling of the overall situation before looking at details (Mooij & Keegan, 1991). Yum (1987) characterized the Korean communication style as being "accommodating" as opposed to confrontational. Koreans will therefore regard a candidate's personality traits, such as honesty, responsibility and confidence, as more important criteria than their political positions on issues.

> Hypothesis 3. Korean newspaper cartoons will put more emphasis on personality-oriented contexts than issue-oriented contexts of presidential candidates' performance than American cartoons.

7. Research methods

(1) Newspaper Comics Sample

This study will focus on the presidential images in newspaper comics from Korea and America. The latest Korean presidential election was on December, 18, 1997. The three candidates were Hoi Chang Lee, Dae Jung Kim and In Jae Rhee. Hoi Chang Lee led the ruling party, and Dae Jung Kim led the first opposition party. In Jae Rhee led another opposition party. The latest American presidential election was November, 2, 1996. The candidates were Bill Clinton, Bob Dole and Ross Perot. Because of the proximity of these two elections, the political cartoon coverage of these two nations will be compared.

This study used only daily cartoons that appeared in the American newspaper*USA Today* and the Korean newspaper*Chosunilbo* . These two newspapers were selected because they had the highest national circulation in their respective countries. The coverage period for *USA Today* was from November 1, 1995 to November 30, 1996. The coverage period for *Chosunilbo* was from October 1, 1996 to October 31, 1997. The comics were on page two of *Chosunilbo* and on the editorial page of *USA Today* . The monitored period of two days per week, Monday and Wednesday, was randomly selected. A total of 192 cartoons were collected from both newspapers. There was 96 cartoons each from *USA Today* and *Chosunilbo* . A content analysis was used to study the cartoons.

Each category was coded whether it was expressed or not. In measuring the tone of the presidential image, coders judged whether it was largely positive, negative or neutral. Coders were also told to judge whether the comics were personality-oriented or issue-oriented.

A chi-square was run to determine whether the presidential images and the tone of the cartoons in Korean and American newspapers were different. A chi-square was also used to determine whether the cartoons of the two countries were personality-oriented or issue-oriented.

(2) Operational definitions

The tone of presidential candidate's image

The negative tone of a presidential candidate's image was coded if an effort was made to diminish the image of the president through satire, ridicule, or castigation and when cartoons portrayed the subject in a negative light or criticized their image in the campaign. On the other hand, the tone was coded positive if cartoons focused on achievement or praised a candidate's image in the campaign. In addition, the tone was coded neutral when cartoons contained neither positive nor negative aspects.

Personal-oriented and issue-oriented

While cartoons were personal-oriented when they described candidates as individuals, referring attributes such as honesty, intelligence, sincerity, strength and so on (Garramone, 1986), cartoons referring to policies advocated by a candidate and future behavior were coded as issue-oriented (Geiger and Reeves, 1991).

Presidential performance criteria

The categories for this study were adapted from other content analyses of presidential performance criteria that Graber and Weaver developed. They developed lists of performance criteria to which over 100 biographers attributed the victory or defeat of presidential races. Based on their criteria, the categories are defined operationally:

> Background: refers to the presidential candidate's education, work experience and ethics.
> Communication style: refers to the way presidential candidates communicate with other people.
> Decision style: involves the style of making decisions, as depicted in comics.
> Intellect: refers to intellectual capabilities and knowledge about surroundings and policies.
> Leadership skills: refers to presidential candidates selling their visions or to manage their staffs.
> Motivation: refers to the inner drives toward the presidency.
> Management style: refers to the presidential candidate's ability to manage their parties.
> Personality: refers to personal style traits like curiosity, honesty, intelligence, and strength and so on.
> Political style: refers to the ability to bargain, to wheel and deal and make concessions with other candidates and organizations as depicted in comics.
> Relationship: refers to traits and talents that allow the presidential candidate to develop sound relationships with people inside their parties and with media as depicted in comics (Graber and Weaver, 1996, p.11).

Cartoons were categorized according to their words and visual images. Figure 2 and 3 in the appendix are examples classified by the categories for this study. As shown in Fig. 2, a cartoon in *Chosunilbo* on Feb. 6,1997, was coded negatively on the tone of the presidential image. It was also coded issue-oriented because it dealt with an important political event. Also it included political style and management style among the presidential performance criteria.

As for a cartoon in *USA Today* on April 29, 1996 (See Figure 3), the presidential image took a positive tone for Bob Dole. It also was coded personality-oriented because it was categorized as using personality and relationship of the presidential performance criteria.

The three coders were trained to extract the connotative meaning of comics.

(3) Coders and reliability

The newspaper comics were coded by trained coders who are proficient in Korean and English. Three coders (a Korean doctoral student in a U.S. journalism school, a Korean-American undergraduate who is proficient in Korean and an American journalist who had work experience at a Korean newspaper) underwent two training sessions. The initial session explained the coding system and categories; the second session reinforced the category definitions and clarified problem categories or definitions. Intercoder reliability, using Holsti's formula (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997, p. 128), yielded an average intercoder reliability of 83 percent.

8. Findings and Results

> Hypothesis 1-a. Korean newspaper cartoons will be different from American cartoons in terms of presidential candidates' backgrounds.

As Table 2 indicates, there is no statistical significance in the presentation of candidates' backgrounds between Korean and American cartoons. Overall, however, Americans deal with candidates' backgrounds more than Koreans. This result indicates that Americans regard the ethics of candidates as important but that Koreans tend to be more toleratant of ethical problems.

> Hypothesis 1-b. Korean newspaper cartoons will be different from American cartoons in terms of presidential candidates' intellect.

There is no statistical significance in the depiction of candidates' intellect between Korean and American cartoons. They deal with candidates' intellect similarly. When considering the property of comics, intellect in comics is not presented more often (see Table 2).

> Hypothesis 1-c. Korean newspaper cartoons will be different from American cartoons in terms of presidential candidates' motivation.

As shown in Table 2, there is no statistical significance in the presentation of candidates' motivations between Korean and American newspapers. However, motivation is more frequent in Korea than America.

> Hypothesis 1-d. Korean newspaper cartoons will be different from American cartoons in terms of presidential candidates' personalities.

There is a statistically significant difference in the presentation of a candidate's personality between Korea and America. As shown in Table 2, analysis of the data concerning personality found that a larger percentage (71.4%) of Korean cartoons included personality, with a smaller percentage (28.6%) in American newspapers. This finding shows that Korean newspaper cartoons addressed candidates' personalities significantly more often. Because of the Korean tendency to avoid confrontation, candidates' personalities are more common than in America. This is consistent with Hypothesis 3.

> Hypothesis 1-e. Korean newspaper cartoons will be different from American cartoons in terms of presidential candidates' relationships.

There is a significant difference in the depiction of candidates' relationships between Korean and American cartoons. As shown in Table 2, a larger percentage (65.2%) of Korean newspaper cartoons presented candidates' relationships. A smaller percentage (34.8%) of America newspaper cartoons fell into this category. This finding shows that Korean newspaper comics presented candidates' relationships significantly more often.

This result indicates that Koreans consider relationships such as regionalism, school relations and kinship important factors. They also support assertions about Korea's social collectivism and that Koreans value dependency and prefer "a tightly knit social structure in which individuals can expect other in-group persons to look after them." On the other hand, in America, individualistic and independent behaviors are more highly valued.

> Hypothesis 1-f. Korean newspaper cartoons will be different from American cartoons in terms of presidential candidates' communication styles.

There is no statistically significant difference in the depiction of candidates' communication style between Korean and American cartoons. Moreover, the percentages of presentations of candidates' communication styles in both Korea and America are lower than expected (see Table 2).

> Hypothesis 1-g. Korean newspaper cartoons will be different from American cartoons in terms of presidential candidates' leadership styles.

As shown in Table 2, there is no statistically significant difference in the presentation of candidates' leadership skills in Korean and American newspaper cartoons.

> Hypothesis 1-h. Korean newspaper cartoons will be different from American cartoons in terms of presidential candidates' political styles.

There is no statistically significant difference in the presentation of candidates' political style between Korean and American cartoons, as shown in Table 2. However, larger percentages of Korean newspaper cartoons (64.5%) and smaller percentages of America newspaper cartoons (37.3%) presented candidates' political styles.

> Hypothesis 1-i . Korean newspaper cartoons will be different from American cartoons in terms of presidential candidates' decision-making styles.

There is no statistically significant difference in references to candidates' decision-making styles in Korean and American cartoons. Overall, the newspaper cartoons of the two countries showed low percentage on decision style (see Table 2).

> Hypothesis 1-j. Korean newspaper cartoons will be different from American cartoons in terms of presidential candidates' management skills.

As Table 2 indicates, there is no statistically significant difference in reference to candidates' management styles in Korean and American cartoons. However, a larger percentage (40.5%) of Korean newspaper cartoons presented candidates' management style than American newspaper (25.4%). This indicates that Korean presidential candidates' management styles are consequential. This is because the collectivism-oriented system in Korean political parties emphasizes members' mutual assistance and cooperation .

Table 2. Presentation of categories between two countries

		America(%)	Korea(%)
Background	Yes	18(30.5)	13(17.6)
	No	41(69.5)	61(82.4)
	χ^2=3.08 (df=1); p=n.s		
Intellect	Yes	10(16.9)	12(16.2)
	No	49(83.1)	62(83.8)
	χ^2=.013 (df=1); p=n.s		
Motivation	Yes	4(6.8)	10(13.5)
	No	55(93.2)	64(86.5)
	χ^2=1.59 (df=1); p=n.s		
Personality	Yes	16(27.1)	40(54.1)
	No	43(72.9)	34(45.9)
	χ^2=9.78 (df=1); $p<.05$		
Relationship	Yes	24(40.7)	45(60.8)
	No	35(59.3)	29(39.2)
	χ^2=5.33 (df=1); $p<.05$		
Communication Style	Yes	17(28.8)	14(18.9)
	No	42(71.2)	60(81.1)
	χ^2=1.80 (df=1); p=n.s		
Leadership Skill	Yes	22(37.3)	24(32.4)
	No	37(62.7)	50(67.6)
	χ^2=.342 (df=1); p=n.s		
Political Style	Yes	22(37.3)	40(54.1)
	No	37(62.7)	34(45.9)
	χ^2=3.71 (df=1); p=n.s		
Decision Style	Yes	15(25.4)	14(18.9)
	No	44(74.6)	60(81.1)
	χ^2=.81 (df=1); p=n.s		
Management Style	Yes	15(25.4)	30(40.5)
	No	44(74.6)	44(59.5)
	χ^2=3.36 (df=1); p=n.s		

> Hypothesis 2. Compared to Korean newspaper cartoons, American cartoons will use a more negative tone concerning presidential candidates' images.

There is a significant difference in depiction of presidential candidates' images in Korean and American cartoons. This finding indicates that American newspaper cartoons use a more negative tone concerning candidates' images. Table 3 shows that a larger percentage of American candidates (69.5%) were depicted negatively than Korean candidates (37.8%). Overall, depiction in a negative tone (51.9%) was highest, and neutral depictions were second highest. Therefore, the negative aspect is stronger than all the other aspects in both country's political cartoons.

Furthermore, America is defined as a low-context culture. Not only do Americans convey most information in outspoken messages, but they also freely express their viewpoints. Therefore, American newspaper cartoons use more negative tones concerning presidential candidates' images. Korean comics depict candidates' images indirectly and subtly because Korea is defined as a high-context culture. This leaves the tone of cartoons in Korea mostly neutral.

Table 3. Nation and the tone of a presidential candidates' images

	America(%)	Korea(%)
Positive	7(11.9)	10(13.5)
Negative	41(69.5)	28(37.8)
Neutral	11(18.6)	36(48.6)

$\chi^2 = 14.78$ (df=2) $p<.05$

> Hypothesis 3. Compared to American newspaper cartoons, Korean cartoons will put more emphasis on personality-oriented aspects than issue-oriented aspects of the presidential candidates' performances.

The results of the analysis show that Korean newspaper cartoons emphasize more personality more than issue. As shown in Table 4, a larger percentage of Korean newspaper comics (77%) emphasizes personality than American cartoons (57.6%). However, both American and Korean newspaper comics emphasized personality-oriented cartoons.

The Korean communication style is described as being accommodation-oriented rather than confrontation-oriented. Direct confrontation in Korea is treated as a blatant disregard of custom. Therefore, it seems that Korean newspapers are personality-oriented to avoid directly confrontational issues. In addition to this, Koreans tend to pay more attention to a person than an issue. This is because the Korean people tend to be more interested in what a person stands for than in what the party pursues. The politics of Korea has followed the principle of centering on a person rather than a party. Both American and Korean newspaper comics emphasize personality-oriented cartoons. The reason is the nature of cartoons lends themselves to images rather than complex issues.

Table 4. Nation and Orientation

	America	Korea
Personality-oriented	34(57.6)	57(77.0)
Issue-oriented	25(42.4)	27(23.0)

$\chi^2 = 5.72$ (df=1) $p<.05$

9. *Conclusion*

This study analyzed the images of presidential candidates in newspaper comics of both Korea and America in terms of the three cultural dimensions. These were ① the context of communication, ② individualism vs. collectivism and ③ confrontation. This study found that these dimensions mirror the cultural differences of the two countries.

Regarding the tone of a presidential candidate's image in cartoons, the context of communication was a good indicator of cultural differences. In the low-context culture of America, most information is delivered directly, even combatively. Therefore, American newspaper cartoons use a more negative tone than Korean cartoons. On the other hand, in the high-context culture of Korea, candidates are depicted subtly and indirectly. This makes the tone of Korean cartoons neutral.

Individualism vs. collectivism was another good determinant of cultural differences, according to the study. The results indicate that relationships such as regionalism, school relations and kinship are important factors in Korean culture. This highlights the assertion that collectivism and dependency are highly valued in Korea. There is a clear preference for "a tightly knit social structure of interdependency." On the other hand, individualism and independence are highly regarded in America.

Confrontation was also found to be a good indicator of different cultural patterns. Being accommodating rather than confrontational is characteristic of Korean communication. Koreans treat direct confrontation as a blatant disregard of custom. Therefore, the presidential images in Korean newspaper cartoons are personality-oriented and avoid political issues. In addition to this, Koreans tend to pay more attention to a person than an issue. This is because the Korean people tend to be more concerned with the person than what policies the candidate's party holds. Another reason that both American and Korean newspaper cartoons emphasize personality more than issues is the visual nature of comics. That is, cartoons can explore images better than they can define complex issues.

Also, a clear difference was found regarding presidential candidates' images in American and Korean cartoons. The three dimensions were good indicators of cultural differences between Western and Asian society.

In addition to the cultural differences, the political environments of the two countries are different and could affect this study. Untested variables include the roles that economy and education could play.

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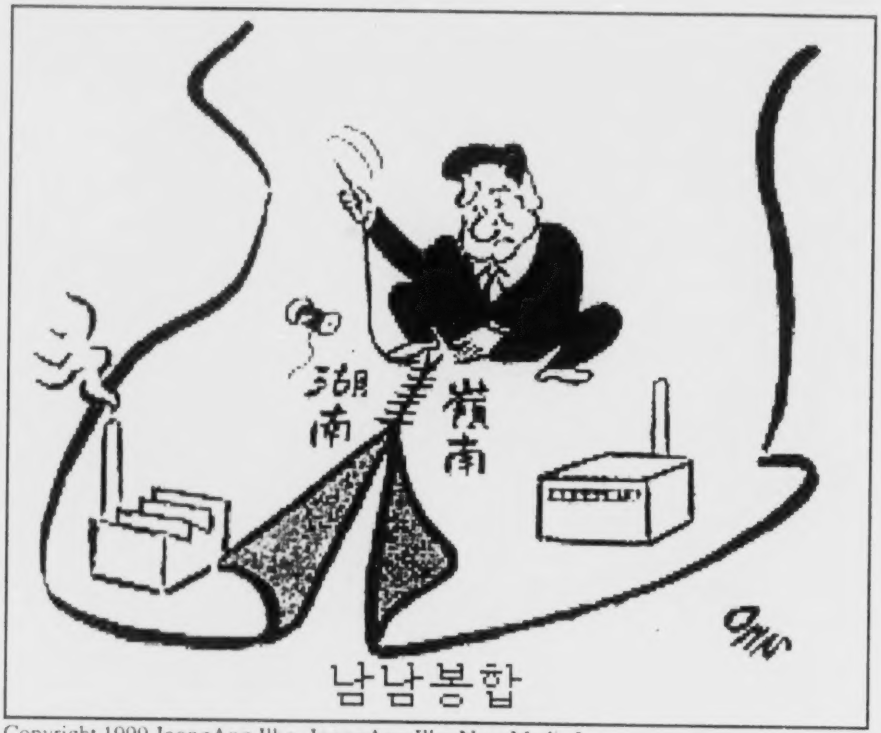
Appendix

Figure 1. Cartoon (Korea)

Sowing or Sewing East and West Regionalism?

Jan 28, 1999



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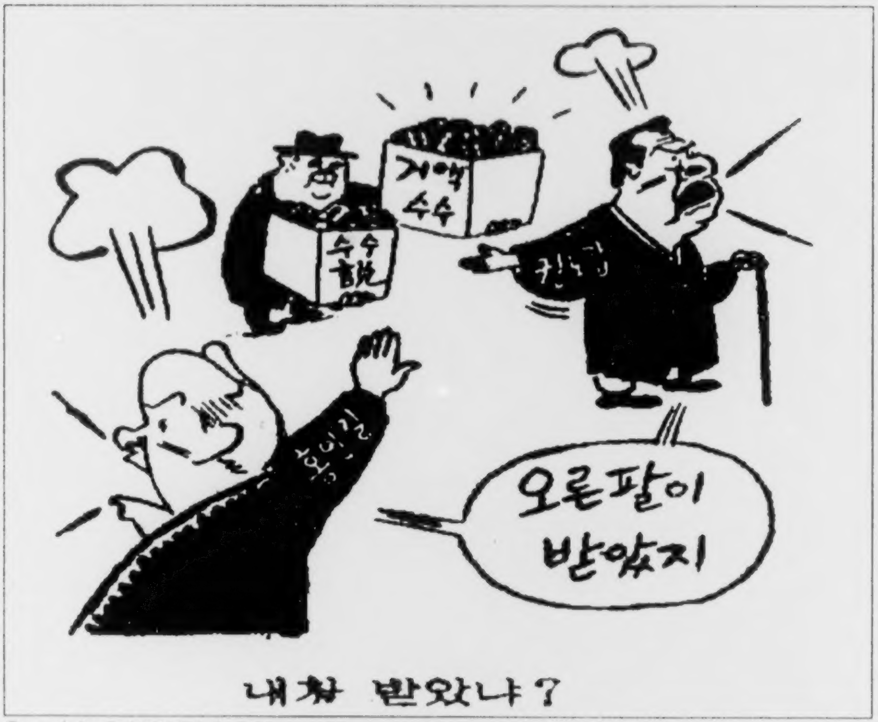
President Kim Dae Jung is trying to repair the historical rift between eastern and western portions of the country.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Figure 2. Cartoon (Korea)

I got it ?

Feb 6, 1997



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Even though the rumor spread that the President, Kim Young Sam, and the presidential candidate, Kim Dae Jung, were bribed, they didn't accept it. And they assert that their staff received the bribe.

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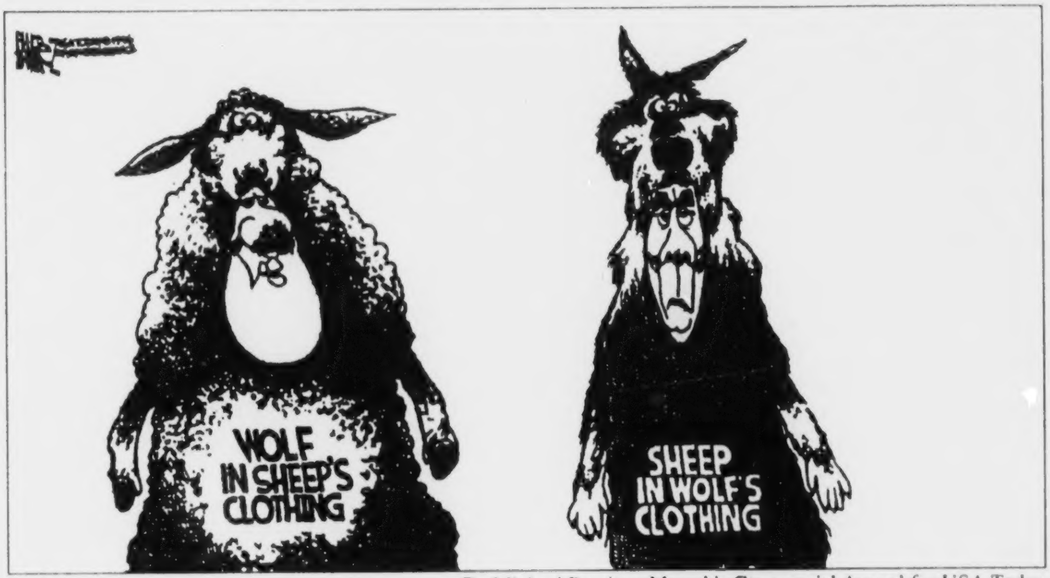
Figure 3. Cartoon (America)

April 29, 1996


WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING
SHEEP IN WOLF'S CLOTHING

By Michael Ramirez, Memphis Commercial Appeal for USA Today

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1. Demographic characteristics

Table 4. Candidates

Candidates	Frequency(percent)
Hoi Chang Lee	21(15.8%)
Dae Jung Kim	35(26.3)
In Jae Rhee	18(13.5)
Bill Clinton	35(26.3)
Bob Dole	19(14.3)
Ross Perot	5(3.8)
Total	133

The frequency of Dae Jung Kim is highest (26.3%) in Korea. Bill Clinton (26.3%) was mentioned most in America.

Table 5. Nation

Nation	Frequency(percent) of presidential image
Korea	74(55.6%)
America	59(43.6)
Total	133

Table 6. Tone of Presidential Image

Tone	Frequency(percent)
positive	17(12.8)
negative	69(51.9)
neutral	47(35.3)
Total	133

Overall, a negative depiction of the presidential candidates' images was highest (51.9%).

Table 7. Presidential Performance Criteria

Presidential Performance Criteria	Frequency
Background	24(18%)
Intellect	4(3)
Motivation	7(5.3)
Personality	11(8.3)
Relationship	25(18.8)
Communication Style	11(8.3)
Leadership Skill	12(9)
Political Style	17(12.8)
Decision Style	13(9.8)
Management Style	9(6.8)
Total	133

The percent of relationship (18.8%) is highest in presidential performance criteria categories. The next are background (18%), political style (12.8%) and decision style (9.8%).

Table 8. Candidates and Categories (%)

	backg-round	intellec t	motiv-ation	perso-nality	relatio-ship	com. style	leaders hip	politica l style	decision style	mana-gement
H.C Lee	12.9%	18.2%	7.1%	21.4%	20.3%		15.2%	14.5%		24.4%
D.J Kim	25.8%	27.3%	14.3%	30.4%	30.4%	22.6%	30.4%	35.5%	24.1%	31.3%
I.J Lee	3.2%	9.1%	50%	19.6%	14.5%	22.6%	6.5%	14.5%	24.1%	11.1%
Bill Cliton	38.7%	22.7%		17.9%	14.5%	32.3%	34.8%	25.8%	41.4%	22.2%
Bob Dole	16.1%	9.1%	21.4%	10.7%	17.4%	9.7%	10.9%	8.1%	10.3%	8.9%
Ross Perot	3.2%	13.6%	7.1%		2.9%	12.9%	2.2%	1.6%		2.2%

For Hoi Chang Lee, the percentage of management (24.4%) is highest. The percentage of political style (35.5%) is highest for Dae Jung Kim. The percentage of motivation (50%) is highest for In Jae Rhee. In the case of America, Bill Clinton is pictured with leadership skill (34.8%), Bob Dole is pictured with motivation (21.4%) and Ross Perot is pictured with intellect (13.6%).

Sounds Exciting!!: The Effects of Auditory Complexity on Listeners' Attitudes and Memory for Radio Promotional Announcements

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Sounds Exciting!!: The Effects of Auditory Complexity on Listeners' Attitudes and Memory for Radio Promotional Announcements

This experiment tested the ability of a limited-capacity model of cognition to predict listener reactions to changes in the structural complexity of radio promotional announcements. Past research shows that certain auditory structural features cause listeners to automatically allocate cognitive resources to message encoding. This study shows that increasing the number of such features in promos leads to better recognition, free-recall, delayed free recall, and more positive attitudes about promos and the stations that produce them.

Sounds Exciting!!:

The Effects of Auditory Complexity on Listeners' Attitudes and Memory for Radio Promotional Announcements

Despite decades of predictions to the contrary, radio continues to be a medium used by millions of Americans. There are over 11,000 radio stations in this country, and over five radios in every United States household (Mateliski, 1995). What's more, those radios are being listened to by a lot of people. Recent industry research indicates that as many as 80% of American adults listen to the radio daily compared to only 73% of adults who watch television (Merli, 1998). In fact, over the past decade the radio audience has continuously increased while the audience for both television and newspapers have declined (Ditingo, 1998). Whether we are tuning in to hear weather and traffic updates, a new hip-hop song, or the public debate surrounding the latest political scandal, there is little doubt that radio continues to be a vital ingredient in the daily media menu of many individuals, and that the number of people being reached by radio is increasing.

The ubiquity of the medium has not gone unnoticed by advertisers, who are expected to funnel more than $16 billion into local station and network radio in 1999 (Ditingo, 1998). Such strong audience and revenue projections have resulted in a flurry of investments in radio broadcasting properties. This, in turn, has led to heightened concentration of station ownership–a phenomenon made possible by the relaxation of ownership restrictions after the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The importance media investors give to radio is well exemplified by Chancellor Media Corporation, who owned 19 radio stations in 1996 and recently paid $4.1 billion to purchase Capstar Broadcasting Company. This gave Chancellor the distinction of being the largest radio owner in the country with a total of 355 properties in over 100 markets (Rathburn, 1998).

With the size of the audience increasing and the amount of money being invested in and on radio stations reaching unprecedented levels, there is little doubt that both the public and the business sector are taking the medium extremely seriously. It is surprising, therefore, that the academic community has not been affording radio the same level of importance. Pease and Dennis (1995) note that researchers have spent comparatively little time and effort investigating radio programming, the radio industry, or how audiences process purely auditory messages. There have been hopeful signs that this may be in the process of changing, however (Corwin, 1998). Recent volumes of the *Journal of Radio Studies* have included insightful inquiries in the area of radio formats and programming (Carroll & Perry, 1995; MacFarland, 1995; Tankel, 1998), as well as research designed to show the impact of different radio news presentation styles on listener perceptions and memory (Gerhard, 1992; Greenberg & Busselle, 1997).

In another line of research focusing on radio message processing (Potter, 1998; Potter, Lang, & Bolls, 1997, 1998), a limited-capacity model of cognition has been employed to predict listeners' physiological responses to, and subsequent memory for, purely auditory signals such as radio messages. The limited-capacity model conceptualizes individuals as cognitive processors with a single, finite pool of cognitive resources (Lang, 1996; Lang, Geiger, Strickwerda, Sumner, 1993). According to the model, the execution of any act of cognition, including the processing of mediated messages, requires resources to be allocated from the limited pool and applied to a combination of (at least) three cognitive tasks: encoding, storage, and retrieval. Encoding is selecting information from the multitude of details in the (real and mediated) environment and allowing it to pass into short-term memory. Storage is the transfer of information from short-term memory into long-term memory. Retrieval is the ability to acquire the information from long-term memory for use and further processing at a later point in time.

When using the media, how well an individual encodes, stores, and retrieves information depends upon several factors. An important one, of course, is the significance or interest that a viewer or listener places on the content of the message. However, the limited-capacity model conceptualizes a mediated message as containing various structural features, several of which elicit a call for an automatic allocation of cognitive resources by viewers to the task of encoding. For example, research has shown that viewers automatically allocate resources to message encoding in response to unrelated cuts (Lang, Bolls, Potter, & Kawahara, in press), related cuts (Lang, Zhou, Schwartz, Bolls, & Potter, under review), the onset of television graphics (Thorson & Lang, 1992), negative video (Lang, Newhagen, & Reeves, 1996), and picture motion (Detenber, Simons, & Bennet, 1998).

The work of Potter and his colleagues (Potter, et al., 1997) indicates that radio messages can be similarly conceptualized as consisting of a number of different structural features, some of which elicit calls for automatic resource allocation in listeners. Specifically, sound effects, production effects, vocal processing, character voices, music onset, and voice changes (replacement of one announcer's voice by another) have been identified as structural features that lead to resource allocation–both in listeners actively involved in radio messages and in listeners who are not (Potter, Lang, & Bolls, 1998; Potter, et al., 1997).

Since the limited-capacity model of television processing generalizes to radio–at least to the extent that messages in both media can be described as containing structural features that affect cognitive processing–a logical next step is to see if the model can predict radio listeners' memory and attitudinal responses in the same way it can for television viewers. Therefore, an experiment was designed that varied the level of auditory structural features in radio promotional announcements (promos) and measured listeners' responses to them.

Why conduct research in radio promotions?

Beginning to generalize the limited-capacity model of television viewing to other media, such as radio, is an important step in advancing mass communication processing theory (Lang, 1996). From a practical standpoint, however, there are several reasons why we chose to explore listener reaction to on-air radio promotional messages. First, while the scarcity of research in the area of radio has already been mentioned, Williams (1998) notes that nowhere is the absence of systematic research more apparent than in the area of promotions, where almost no empirical work has been done. Second, it is in promotions where knowledge about how to produce effective audio messages can be immediately applied by radio practitioners. When considering "The Four P's of Marketing" (Product, Place, Price, and Promotion; Berkowitz, Kerin, Hartley, & Rudelius, 1992), it is primarily in the area of promotion where local radio managers can have a substantial impact on the sound and image of their station. As Buchman (1991) has argued, in the American radio marketplace station owners and programming consultants often dictate the station's product in terms of format and music titles played; individual listeners determine the place where radio content is consumed, and the price of radio is free–aside from periodic inconveniences of commercial interruption. The creative control behind the design and execution of on-air promotional campaigns and the production of pre-recorded promos, however, remains primarily in the hands of local Program Directors, Promotion Managers, and Production

Directors. This is even the case at individual stations that are a part of large media conglomerates (Vigil, 1998).

The substantial impact that research findings could have on the overall success of a radio property provides another reason why promotion is an important area to investigate. Establishing which variables positively affect listeners' perceptions of a station, or identifying how to make a station's call letters easier to remember, could translate into significant increases in that station's ratings. Local radio ratings data are collected by the Arbitron Ratings Company who mails paper diaries to a random sample of residents in each market (Webster & Lichty, 1991). Diary holders are asked to record their radio listening over the course of a 7-day period. An obvious drawback to this methodology is that listeners tend not to be diligent in their record keeping and instead often try to recall an entire week's worth of listening just prior to sending the diary back to Arbitron. It is arguable, therefore, that actual listening is not as important as the perception a listener has of a particular station and the ease with which the station's call letters, dial position, or marketing positioning statement can be recalled. This is precisely the argument made by Buchman (1991):

> Because of the delay between listening and reporting, many promotion managers and broadcast marketing consultants believe that the positioning of a station relative to the positions occupied by its competitors is vastly more important for ratings success than actual station listening. Because they are unlikely to recall all of their listening accurately, many Arbitron diary-keepers. . .will respond in the survey by naming the station that presents the image with which they most closely identify, rather than with an accurate description of their actual listening behavior (p. 142).

So, by conducting research on the effects of auditory structural variables on listeners' reactions to radio promos, not only can we investigate an area where results can be immediately applied, but also where such an application can have substantial impact.

Measuring the effectiveness of radio promotions

Most television promos are designed to inform viewers about a particular television program and direct them to an exact day and time when that episode will be broadcast (Eastman, 1991). This has led much of the research in television promotion effectiveness to use the Nielsen ratings that the promoted episode received as an outcome variable (Walker, 1993; Eastman, Newton, Riggs, & Neal-Lunsford, 1997; Eastman & Newton, 1999). Such a research design is less practical for the study of radio promo effectiveness since modern radio programming rarely delivers regularly scheduled "shows" to an audience in a manner similar to television. Instead, radio programming is delivered as an on-air format–a style of music, news, or information designed to attract a specific demographic and psychographic audience (Keith, 1987). Most radio promos, therefore, do not direct the audience to listen at a particular day and time but rather are designed to create a strong image of the radio station in the minds of listeners (Buchman, 1991).

As a result of this fundamental difference in the goals of radio and television on-air promotional campaigns, this experiment did not use ratings as a dependent measure but rather chose to vary structural attributes of radio promos and measure changes in: 1) listener attitudes toward the promos, 2) listener attitudes toward the stations that produced the promos, and 3) listener memory for the promos

The effects auditory complexity on listener recognition memory

Early work in children's attention to television showed that information delivered through the audio track was just as important as anything that appeared on the screen, if not more so (Anderson & Lorch, 1983; Watt & Welch, 1983). Watt and Welch (1983), for example, found that changes in the audio track caused previously inattentive children to turn and look at *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood.* Furthermore, programs that had a soundtrack high in auditory structural complexity resulted in higher recognition memory in young viewers than programs with comparatively simple soundtracks.

Watt (1994) later transferred the concept of auditory complexity to radio commercials, describing how each audio production could be classified along a continuum anchored by the poles "high dynamic complexity" and "dynamic simplicity". For example, a commercial with several quick cuts between an announcer, music, and sound effects would be classified as highly complex. On the other hand, a commercial containing no music or sound effects and only a single announcer giving a flat delivery would be classified as simple.

Potter, Lang, & Bolls (1998) expanded on Watt's definition by specifically identifying auditory elements that increase the structural complexity of a radio message. Their findings show that introducing sound effects, production effects, music, funny voices, and changes between two different announcers increases the amount of cognitive resources that listeners allocate to processing the message. Furthermore, this increase in resource allocation resulted in better recognition memory for information immediately following complexity features compared to information immediately preceding them.

Building on these results, Potter (1998) conducted an experiment in which the number of voice changes between two announcers was systematically varied in a series of 2-minute radio messages with simple content. One purpose of this study was to determine if the automatic allocation of resources to voice changes would eventually cease after the structural feature had been repeated a number of times. This habituation phenomenon is exhibited by humans in response to more simple auditory stimuli such as short, single-frequency tone pips or white noise (Graham, 1973; Gianaros & Quigly, 1997). Potter's (1999) results show that, at least over the course of 2-minute messages, radio listeners did not habituate to voice changes. Rather, this structural feature consistently resulted in automatic resource allocation.

A second purpose of the experiment was to test whether increasing the number of times a structural feature was used in a radio production would increase the automatic allocation of cognitive resources to encoding, and thereby improve listeners' recognition memory for information in the message. Results confirmed this prediction; participants had better recognition memory for messages with a high number of voice changes compared to messages with only a few of them (Potter, 1998).

The current study applies these results to the task of listening to radio promotional announcements that vary in their level of auditory structural complexity. A promo's level of auditory structural complexity is conceptually defined as the number of resource-eliciting auditory structural features it contains. It is predicted that promos with a high number of these features will cause listeners to experience a series of calls for automatic resource allocation to encoding while promos without these features will not lead to such a series of calls. As a result, it is expected that information in highly complex radio promos will be better encoded than information in simple promos. Since past research has used recognition memory as a measure of encoding effectiveness (Lang, 1995; Zechmeister & Nyberg, 1982), the following hypothesis is made:

H1: There will be a main effect of auditory complexity on recognition memory such that participants will have better recognition for information in complex promos compared to simple promos.

The effects of auditory complexity on listener arousal and recall

Many media scholars have noted the important role that audience arousal plays in media processing (Singer, 1980; Zillmann, 1982; Christ, 1985; Perse, 1996). Traditionally, audience arousal has been viewed as resulting primarily from programming content. However, Lang and her colleagues (Lang, et al, in press) have shown that regardless of the arousingness of the content they are watching, viewer arousal levels are also affected by altering the structural complexity of the messages. Increasing the number of structural features in a television message, for example, leads to an increase in viewers' self-reported arousal.

While no published research investigates how increasing the number of structural features in audio messages relates to listener arousal, the results from the television literature support the following prediction:

H2: There will be a main effect of auditory complexity on self-reported arousal levels such that complex radio promos will be more arousing than simple promos.

The psychology of emotion literature has shown that when people are aroused they automatically allocate a portion of their limited cognitive resources to storing information in long-term memory (P.J. Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 1997). This automatic allocation results in better free-recall of information processed during periods of high arousal compared to periods of relative calm (Bradley, 1994). This effect has been repeatedly shown in television viewers (Lang, Dhillon, & Dong, 1995; Bolls, Potter, & Lang, 1996) and has recently been extended to radio listeners (Bolls, Lang, Potter, & Snyder, 1999). Therefore, if increasing the structural complexity of radio promos is expected to increase listener arousal levels, the limited-capacity model predicts that listeners will automatically allocate cognitive resources to storing information in the promos. Therefore:

H3: There will be a main effect of complexity on free recall memory listeners will recall more complex radio promos than simple promos.

The effects of auditory complexity on listener attitudes

Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion provides a theoretical basis for predictions made about the effects of auditory complexity on listener attitudes. The ELM postulates two different types of cognitive processing: central and peripheral. In a persuasive context, central processing consists of the careful cognitive deliberation of points made by a source. When one engages in peripheral processing, on the other hand, simple cues in the persuasive message are employed in order to form attitudes toward the topic (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Radio promos are not expected to be the type of media that listeners become extremely involved in and process centrally. Rather, it is predicted that participants will engage in peripheral processing to a large extent while listening to the promos. Therefore, we expect that participants will be quite susceptible to manipulations of executional cues such as auditory structural features when forming attitudes about the promos and the radio stations that produced them.

Since a radio promo can be viewed as an advertisement for the station that produced it (Eastman, 1991), our hypotheses were based on the advertising literature that applies the ELM to attitude formulation. Lutz (1985) used the ELM to develop a general attitude toward the ad measure (Aad) that has proven to be a good index of whether a person responds "in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion" (p. 46). Recently, research in television advertising (Yoon, Bolls, & Lang, 1998) has shown that viewers have more favorable attitudes toward structurally complex ads compared to structurally simple ones. The same prediction is therefore made concerning radio promos:

> H4: There will be a main effect of auditory complexity on listeners' overall attitude toward radio promotions. Listeners will have more positive perceptions of promos produced with many auditory structural features compared to those produced with a only a few features.

Yoon, Bolls, & Lang (1998) have also shown that increasing the structural complexity of television commercials improves participants' attitudes toward the brand being advertised. Making an analogy between the brand sponsor of a television advertisement and the radio station sponsor of a particular promotional announcement leads to the following hypothesis:

> H5: There will be a main effect of complexity on attitudes toward the stations that produced the promos such that listeners will think more positively about stations that produced complex promos compared to stations that produced simple ones.

Method

Design

This experiment employed a mixed 2 (Complexity) X 5 (Message) X 2 (Order of Presentation) factorial design. Order of Presentation was the only between-subjects factor and represented the two systematic tape orders created for experimental presentation. The Complexity factor was a within-subjects factor with two levels, high and low. The Message factor was also a within-subjects factor. It had five levels representing the five promos used in each level of the Complexity factor.

Research Participants

Participants were 41 undergraduates (22 males) enrolled in courses in the College of Communication and Information Sciences at a large Southeastern university. The participants all provided informed consent and received course credit for their participation. All were unaware of the specific purposes of the experiment, but were told the experiment would investigate how people process mediated messages.

Stimulus Material

Stimulus messages were chosen from cassette tapes obtained through a subscription to *Radio and Production* magazine. This monthly publication targets radio production professionals and includes discussions of the latest in audio production equipment and techniques. A regular monthly feature of the magazine is a cassette tape that features samples of exemplary audio productions created and submitted by magazine subscribers. These audio productions include promotional announcements as well as commercials, station identifications, and music sweepers. The promos used in this study were included on the *Radio and Production* cassettes between November 1997 and September 1998.

Stimulus messages were chosen from this source for two reasons. First, doing so allowed for the selection of promos from radio stations outside of the listening area in which the experiment took place. Secondly, since the promos were submitted by actual radio station Production Directors and chosen by the editors of an industry production trade magazine, it was assumed they represented illustrations of radio production techniques as they currently exist.

All of the promos on the cassettes were initially judged according to the extent to which they used auditory structural features shown to cause automatic cognitive resource allocation. These features were defined as voice changes (replacement of one voice by another in the auditory stream), sound effects, production effects, vocal processing, character voices, and music onset. Promos which contained a high number of these features were identified as structually complex. Promos using only a few of these structural features were considered structurally simple. Ten advertisements were chosen for inclusion in this experiment, five representative of the High Complexity level and five representative of the Low Complexity level.

The High and Low levels of the Complexity condition both contained one promo from each of the following programming formats: alternative rock, classic rock, top 40, oldies, and news/talk. The duration of the promos varied from 30 to 75 seconds. However, duration was balanced across levels of the Complexity factor. This was done by ensuring that each level contained one promo between 30 and 39 seconds in duration, two between 40 and 49 seconds in duration, one between 50 and 59 seconds, and one between 60 and 75 seconds.

Two presentation orders of the 10 commercials were created. One of the orders began with a high complexity promotion; the other with a low complexity promotion. Both orders then alternated between high and low complexity promotions. The orders were systematically designed to prevent any two promotions from being heard sequentially in both presentations. Also, to prevent possible primacy and/or recency effects, no promotion appeared exclusively in the first or last quarter of both orders.

Since the initial determination of auditory complexity was made subjectively, a pretest was conducted using participants similar to those who would later complete the final experiment. Participants (n=19) completed the pretest in groups of 2-6. The procedure consisted of listening to the ten radio promos and completing four semantic differential scales after hearing each. The seven-point scales were designed to assess complexity using the following semantic poles: Complex/Simple; Extreme/Mild; Complicated/Basic; and Extravagant/Plain.

Pretest data were combined into a complexity index for each promo (alpha coefficient = .94). These indices were then submitted to a mixed 2 (Order of Presentation) x 2 (Complexity) x 5 (Message) MANOVA. The factors for this analysis were the same as discussed above.

Results from the pre-test analysis confirmed the earlier classification of the radio promotional announcements. High complexity promos were rated as being significantly more complex ($M = 4.66$, s.d = .58) than low complexity promos ($M = 2.85$, s.d. = .69, ($F(1, 17) = 130.53$, $p. < .000$)).

Experimental Procedure

Two experimenters conducted the final study, each following the same experimental protocol. Research participants, who were randomly assigned to one of the two orders of presentation, were scheduled for participation in the study in groups of three to twenty. Participants were instructed they would hear 10 promotional announcements from actual radio stations and would be asked to respond to a short questionnaire following each.

The promos were played one at a time off cassette tape through a portable stereo cassette player. In between each, the tape was paused and participants filled out self-report attitude measures consisting of several seven-point scales. The scales included the following:

Complexity of Promo: Research participants were asked how they would evaluate the production elements used in the promotional advertisement. The anchors of the seven-point scales were Complex/Simple, Extreme/Mild, Complicated/Basic, and Extravagant/Plain. Data obtained in this section served as a manipulation check

Overall Attitude Towards the Promotion: Participants were asked how they would evaluate the promotion overall. The anchors of the seven-point scales were Unattractive/Attractive, Depressing/Refreshing, Unappealing/Appealing, Unpleasant/Pleasant, Dull/Dynamic, and Not Enjoyable/Enjoyable.

Overall Attitude Toward the Station: Research participants were also asked three individual questions concerning their impressions of the radio station that produced the promo. The anchors of these seven-point questions were Unprofessional/Professional, Dull/Exciting, and A Station I Would NEVER Listen To/A Station I Would ALWAYS Listen To.

Finally, participants provided ratings of their emotional responses to each promo using the SAM (Self-Assessment Mankin) scale (Lang, Greenwald, Bradley, & Hamm, 1993). The SAM is a series of 3, nine-point pictorial scales used to evaluate self-reported emotional responses to stimuli along the dimensions of arousal, valence, and dominance (Bradley, 1994).

The scale has been found to a valid and reliable measure of emotional responses to advertising (Morris, 1995; Yoon, Bolls, Lang, & Potter, 1997; Bolls & Potter, 1998) and research in cognitive psychology has shown it to be reliable and valid in responses given to purely auditory stimuli (Bradley, 1990; Verona et al., 1997). While data were collected for participants arousal, valence, and dominance responses to the promos, only the arousal data are reported here to address Hypothesis 2.

After listening to the radio promos and completing the questionnaires, participants were asked to review a series of four magazine advertisements and answer questions concerning their appropriateness for a college audience. This procedure served as a distraction task and was designed to purge participants' short-term memory for the promos. Following completion of the distraction task, participants were told that the researcher was interested in testing their memory for the radio promotions. Participants were first instructed to list all the station names and promotion descriptions they could remember on a free-recall form. The single-page form consisted of 10 blanks for station names and 10 blanks for promotion descriptions. After participants had completed the free recall section, they were asked to answer a series of multiple-choice questions designed to test recognition memory of information given in the promos. The multiple-choice test was comprised of 10 sheets of paper, each containing 3, four-option questions about a particular promo. The questions for each announcement were derived from content taken from each third of the total duration of the promo. For example, from a 60-second promo participants were asked to recognize information from each 20 seconds of the production. The recognition test packets themselves were created in three different orders of presentation to control for serial order effects in the recognition data. Participants were instructed to answer all 30 of the questions, and to guess rather than leave any of the questions unanswered.

Upon completion of the memory portions of the experiment, participants were asked to provide their telephone numbers and a convenient time for them to be contacted by the researchers 48 to 96 hours later. They were then thanked for their cooperation and sent away.

During the delayed-recall phase of data collection, participants (n=36) were contacted via telephone and asked to list any of the station names, call letters, and promotional descriptions they could remember from the promos they heard during the experiment. Researchers recorded these responses, thanked the participants, and terminated the call.

Analyses

Mean scores were calculated for all the scales. The pictorial SAM arousal ratings were converted into their appropriate numeric values and mean scores obtained. The data from each self-reported category were submitted to a 2 (Complexity) X 5 (Message) X 2 (Order of Presentation) repeated measures ANOVA. No significant effects were found for order of presentation, the only between subjects factor.

For the immediate and delayed free recall measures each station call letter/name and promotional description recalled was scored and then categorized as either high or low complexity. The answers given to the recognition multiple-choice questions were coded as either correct or incorrect. Participant's recognition scores for each promo, therefore, ranged from 0 (no information correctly recognized) to 3 (all information correctly recognized). All memory data were analyzed using a 2 (Complexity) X 5 (Message) X 2 (Order of Presentation) repeated measures ANOVA.

Results

Manipulation Check

Even though pretests showed significant differences in the perceived structural complexity of the two groups of promos, a manipulation check was conducted to ensure that the same perceptions were experienced by the participants in the actual experiment. The same series of 7-point semantic differential scales used in the pretest were answered by the participants following their exposure to each promo. Mean responses to the scale items were obtained (alpha=.95) and submitted to a mixed 2 (Complexity) x 2 (Order) ANOVA. Results show a significant manipulation in the two levels of the Complexity factor ($F(1,39) = 313.49$, $p. < .001$) with participants finding the messages in the High level more complex ($M = 5.14$, s.d. = .70) than the messages in the Low level ($M = 3.21$, s.d. = .78).

Hypothesis 1

This hypothesis predicted that participants would have significantly better recognition memory for information in complex promos compared to simple promos. The hypothesis was based on the theoretical prediction that the high number of structural features in the complex promos would result in more frequent automatic allocation of cognitive resources to information encoding. Results show a significant main effect for complexity on recognition data ($F(1,39) = 11.89$, $p. < .001$, $\epsilon^2 = .2140$). Listeners had significantly higher recognition scores for information in complex promos ($M = 10.32$ out of 15.00, s.d. = 2.13) compared to information in simple promos ($M = 8.98$, s.d. = 2.09). This main effect can be seen in Figure 1. Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2

This hypothesis predicted that participants would report feeling more aroused while listening to radio promos with a high number of structural features compared to promos with a small number of features. There was a significant main effect for complexity on SAM arousal ratings ($F\ (1,39) = 105.99$, $p. < .001$, $\epsilon^2 = .7158$). As predicted, participants reported higher arousal in response to the complex promos ($M = 6.46$, s.d. $= 1.13$) compared to the structurally simple ones ($M = 4.22$, s.d. $= .98$).

Hypothesis 3

The limited-capacity model predicts that the increased arousal listeners experience as a result of the increase in structural complexity will be manifest through better free recall for complex messages compared to simple ones. This is because the increased sense of arousal causes cognitive resources to be automatically allocated to the process of information storage.

The results of the free recall data show no effect of complexity on listeners' ability to recall call letters or names of individual stations. However, there was a main effect of complexity on the ability to recall the promos themselves ($F(1,39) = 32.56$, $p. < .001$, $\epsilon^2 = .4200$). Listeners were able to recall a significantly greater number of complex promos ($M = .51$, s.d. $= .21$) than the simple promos ($M = .25$, s.d. $= .21$).

The delayed free recall results indicate that this effect was robust. Respondents (n=36) were contacted on average 109. 31 hours (approx. 4.5 days) after their participation in the experiment. Even after this period of time, there was a significant main effect for complexity ($F(1, 34) = 36.22$, $p. < .001$, $\epsilon^2 = .4923$) on free recall, with participants able to recall more of the complex promos ($M = .48$, s.d. $= .22$) than the simple ones ($M = .19$, s.d. $= .20$).

Hypothesis 4

This hypothesis predicted a main effect of auditory complexity on listeners' overall attitudes toward the radio promotions. Since the alpha level for the attitude toward the ad scale questions was sufficiently high (.95), a mean attitude score was created for each participant. Results of the analyses on these mean scores show the predicted main effect (F(1,39) = 14.86, p. < .001, ϵ^2 = .2408), with complex promos resulting in significantly more favorable attitudes (M = 4.74, s.d. = .59) than simple promos (M = 4.27, s.d. = .88). Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Hypothesis 5

This hypothesis predicted that listeners will think more positively about radio stations that produced complex promos compared to stations that produced simple ones. We measured attitudes toward the station by asking participants to respond to three, 7-point semantic differential scales. Responses to these scales were then analyzed separately.

Results show that listeners do not believe there is a significant difference in the level of professionalism between stations that produce complex promos and stations that produce simple ones. However, there was a significant effect of complexity on the perceived excitement of the stations (F(1,39) = 96.08, p. < .001, ϵ^2 = .7037). Stations that produce complex promos (M = 5.69, s.d. .69) are perceived as being more exciting than stations that produce simple ones (M = 4.01, s.d. = .94). Furthermore, there was a significant effect of complexity on the estimated time participants would spend listening to the stations that produced the promos (F (1,39) = 42.77, p. < .001, ϵ^2 = .5014). Participants were more likely to say they would always listen to the stations that produced the complex promos (M = 4.99, s.d. = .85) compared to stations that produced simple promos (M = 3.90, s.d.= .89).

Discussion

This experiment explored the predictive ability of a limited-capacity model of cognition on listeners' memory for radio promotional announcements and attitudes toward the stations that produce them. Specifically, it was predicted that increasing the auditory structural complexity of radio promos would increase listener memory and lead to more positive evaluations of the promos themselves and the radio stations that they represent. Past research has shown that certain auditory structural features, such as sound effects and announcer changes, reliably elicit an automatic call for cognitive resources in radio listeners. In the current study, two levels of auditory complexity were established, with auditory structural complexity defined according to the relative number of resource-eliciting audio features a promo contained.

The results provide strong support for the limited-capacity model. As predicted, increasing the structural complexity of the promos increased listeners' memory. This effect was found not only in the task of freely recalling the promotional messages, but also in being able to recognize detailed information presented in them. Furthermore, improvement in free recall due to increases in structural complexity was robust over time. After an average of more than four days delay, participants still recalled significantly more complex promos than simple ones.

One possible mechanism for this recall effect is variance in audience autonomic arousal responses to the promos. As predicted, participants reported that complex promos made them feel more aroused than simple promos. This is consistent with literature in the area of television message processing. However, while the video literature has also shown physiological reactions that parallel self-reported assessments of arousal, future research in audio processing should employ physiological measures to replicate the effects of structural changes on listener arousal.

The current results also show that auditory structural complexity has a substantial effect on listener attitudes toward the promos and the stations they represent. Participants had more favorable attitudes toward complex promos compared to simple ones. They also reported that stations using complex auditory productions to promote themselves were more exciting and were more likely to be the type of station they would listen to often.

The substantial effects that auditory complexity had on both memory and listener attitudes should be of utmost interest to radio practitioners, particularly considering the large role that both memory and attitude play in the current U.S. radio ratings system. Since the experimental design was balanced for both promo duration and station format across levels of the complexity condition, a case can be made that regardless of how long your production or the format of your station, something as simple as adding sound effects or a second announcer to your on-air promotions could result in better memory for the promo and a better station image in the minds of your listeners.

There are several limitations to the current study, all of which we believe are best viewed as opportunities for future research. To begin with, these promos were played as stand-alone stimuli for participants in a laboratory situation. While the effects that were found are both interesting and applicable, future research should attempt to investigate how the level of structural complexity affects listeners in a more natural listening environment. Two of the many possibilities include having the participants complete other tasks while having the promos played in the background, and inserting the promos between commercials or music to see how the context of surrounding programming interacts with the structural complexity of the promotional production.

This study used college-aged participants. While the psychology literature suggests that age will not significantly impact the overall effects of the memory data, it is possible that different results would be obtained in the attitude data if this study were to be replicated using older adults.

Finally, while there was an effect of complexity on recall of the actual promos, there was not a similar effect on the ability to recall the specific name or call letters of the stations themselves. In hindsight, this is not surprising since the promos were taken from stations outside of the market in which the experiment was conducted and therefore participants had only heard the call letters a few times when they were asked to recall them. As a result, free recall of call letters from both complex and simple promos was very low. Future research should try to develop an experimental design which allows for the investigation of complexity on memory for call letters and station names considering the important role they play in current radio ratings data collection methodologies.

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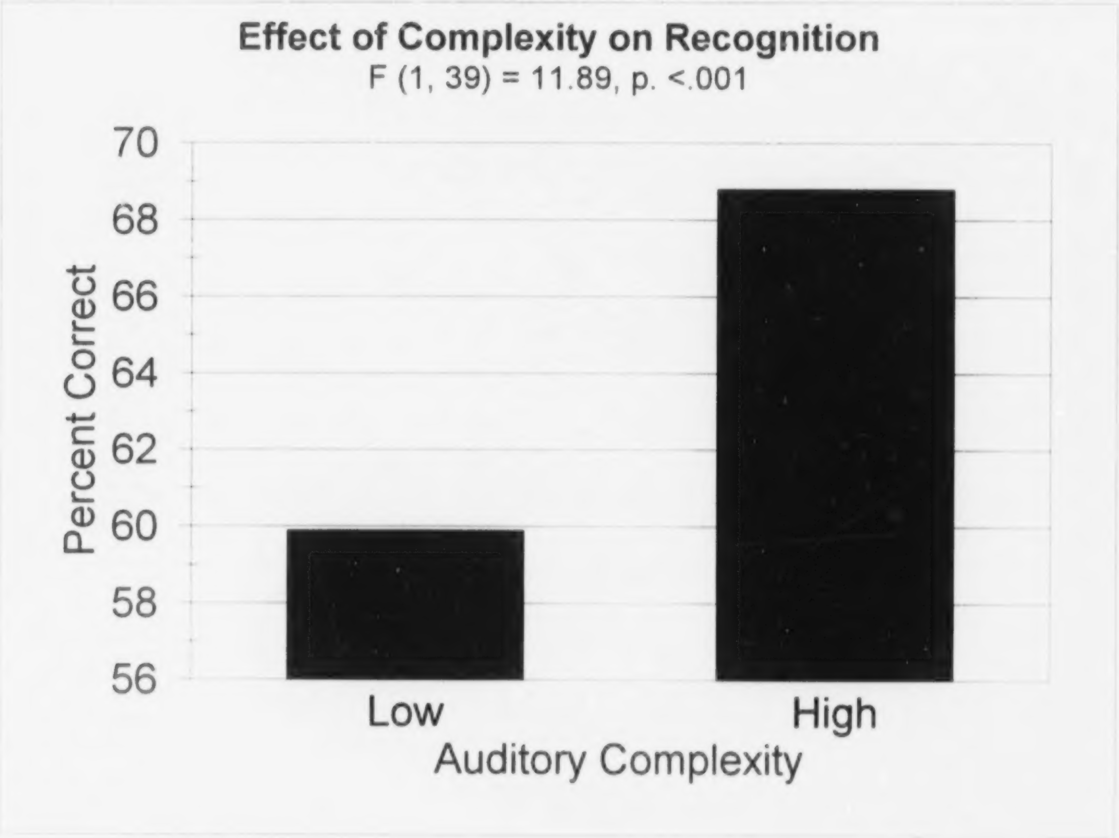
Figure 1: Main effect of structural complexity on recognition memory


Effect of Complexity on Recognition
F (1, 39) = 11.89, p. <.001
70
68
66
64
62
60
58
56
Percent Correct
Low
High
Auditory Complexity

An Efficacy Model of Electoral Campaigns:
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ABSTRACT

An Efficacy Model of Electoral Campaigns:
The 1996 Presidential Election

This study developed and empirically tested a conceptual model of political efficacy during an electoral campaign. We used structural equations to simultaneously assess 12 causal links between campaign interest, political news exposure, political ads exposure, internal and external efficacy, political participation and voting intention. Data from a survey of 362 adult residents of Pulaski County in Arkansas provided support for the hypotheses that campaign interest leads to exposure to information-rich sources which, in turn, political efficacy. Influence internal and external efficacy lead to political participation and voting intention.

An Efficacy Model of Electoral Campaigns:
The 1996 Presidential Election

Journalists who fanned across the nation in the months leading up to the 1996 presidential election to try to read the pulse of the nation reported that they could barely find one. Studies suggest only 24 percent of the electorate paid close attention to the 1996 campaign, down from 42 percent four years earlier (Pew Research Center 1996), and television coverage declined 40 percent from 1992 (Kurtz 1996). Indeed, the 1996 election will probably be remembered less for Bill Clinton's victory at the polls than for a turnout rate that dropped to its lowest level since 1924. As one political observer noted, the issue that dominated the 1996 campaign was not crime, the economy or even character but the "sheer crashing boredom among the electorate" ("Wake Me" 1996, 34). This bored, discontented electorate became a major theme of coverage by the equally bored press (Grove 1996; Harwood 1996; Greenfield 1996; Booth 1996; Ullmann 1996; Solov 1996; Ahrens 1996).

The pundits advanced several theories for why citizens failed to show up to the voting booth in 1996: the candidates generated little enthusiasm (Solomon 1996; Broder 1995) and they ran a listless campaign utterly devoid of issues (Baker 1997; Mashek 1997; "Bored to the Bone" 1996; Ullmann 1996); poll-driven media coverage convinced the public that the race was over by the start of the general election campaign; and the media's negative coverage, coupled with the barrage of negative ads, alienated the public from the campaign (Bennet 1996; Cleghorn 1996; Diamond, Shepnick and Stenzler 1996; Grossberger 1996).

The 1996 election, however, was not merely an aberration. Polls show that the public is becoming increasingly disenchanted and cynical about public officials and the media that cover them, and are disengaged from a political process which they believe they have little influence over and which does not operate in their interest. For instance, a 1996 Gallup poll found that more than half of those surveyed reported they were "dissatisfied with the way things are going in the U.S.," double the amount from 10 years earlier (Ladd 1996). A 1993 Freedom Forum survey found that 70 percent of the public felt that "the country is really governed by a handful of powerful politicians, journalists and businesses; what the public wants or does has little effect on things" (Kees and Phillips 1994). And while studies do indicate that Americans' optimism about their own future has reached near-record levels, public optimism for the future of this country was even lower after the 1996 campaign than when Richard Nixon resigned in 1974 (Pew Research Center 1997)

Scholars and media critics have identified a spiral of disaffection in which people lack interest in the political system, which reduces their use of information-rich information sources such as newspapers which increases their cynicism and decreases their efficacy. This, in turn, further decreases their interest and political participation. On the other hand, interest in the campaign can lead to a more purposeful use of the media which, in turn, can motivate political participation (Austin and Pinkleton 1997; Pinkleton and Austin 1998).

AN EFFICACY MODEL

While several studies have noted a link between media use, political efficacy and political participation, only a few have tested the relationship between these measures. This study tests a political efficacy model involving campaign interest, traditional media and political advertising use, external and internal efficacy, level of campaign activity and intent to vote. Specifically, the model predicts that interest in the campaign motivates people to search for campaign information in the media and political ads. Using information-rich media like newspapers, in turn, increases both internal efficacy (the degree to which people believe they can influence the actions of politicians and the government) and external efficacy (the degree to which people perceive the government responds to the public's demands). On the other hand, use of the more information poor political ads can reduce efficacy. People's belief they can influence the political system and that government responds to their needs leads individuals to participate more in politics as well as increases the likelihood they will vote.

Figure 1 About Here

Campaign Interest and Media Use

Media researchers, operating within the media effects paradigm, traditionally examine the degree to which media influence people's interest in politics in general or in presidential campaigns in particular. Studies consistently find that media use predicts political interest (Drew and Weaver 1998; Weaver, Drew and Wu 1998; Johnson, Braima and Sothirajah 1997; Weaver 1996; Weaver and Drew 1995; McLeod et al. 1996a) with effects often higher for broadcast than print media (McLeod et al 1996b; Weaver and Drew 1995; Drew and Weaver 1998).

However, several scholars who have studied the variables over time suggest that researchers have the relationship reversed. Those who are more involved and interested in the campaign are more likely to seek out campaign information than the less interested. Learning more about the candidates and their issues can, in turn, boost campaign interest (Tan 1980; Atkin, Galloway and Nayman 1976; McCombs and Mullins 1973; Weaver et al. 1981). Those who are more involved and interested in the campaign will use the media more purposefully (Austin and Pinkleton 1997; Kahihan and Chaffee 1996; Chaffee and McLeod 1973; Chaffee and Schleuder 1986; McCombs 1972) and consequently gain more knowledge (Pinkleton, Reagan, Aaronson and Chen 1997). In general the politically interested turn to newspapers over other sources because they have more political information (Pinkleton and Austin 1998; Chew 1994; Culbertson and Stempel 1986; McLeod and Becker 1981; Tan 1980).

H_1: Higher levels of campaign interest will be positively related to more political news exposure.

Campaign Interest and Political Ads

Scholars disagree about the influence of campaign interest on using campaign ads for campaign information. Some research indicates that the less involved voters learn more from political ads (Patterson and McClure 1974; Hofstetter, Zukin, and Buss 1978). However, others have found that advertising recall is connected to both information seeking (Atkin et al. 1973; Atkin 1972) and political interest (Faber and Storey 1984). Furthermore, Faber, Tims and Schmitt (1983) found that political interest and campaign interest were associated with a greater influence of ads on candidate voter preference. They note that those who are more involved with politics may attend to more campaign information, including advertising. Finally, Garramone (1984) discovered that those highly involved in politics are more likely to be negatively influenced regarding the campaign ad's target than the less involved voter, at least among those supporting neither candidate and for highly educated voters. Garramone speculates that those who haven't decided on a candidate may be actively seeking out information to make a decision and they, therefore, may be more receptive to ads.

While results are not unanimous, most studies suggest that the politically interested will search out information from a variety of sources, including campaign ads.

H_2: Higher level of campaign interest will be positively related to more political ads exposure.

Media use and political efficacy

As the media have increasingly replaced political parties as the primary means candidates employ to communicate with potential voters, so have accusations that the media, particularly television, are responsible for breeding alienation and apathy among American voters and ultimately reducing voter turnout (Lichter and Noyes 1996; Fallows 1996; Dionne 1991). Both media critics and researchers contend that media coverage has become increasingly negative since the early 1960s (Buchanan 1996; Lichter and Noyes 1996; Walsh 1996; Patterson 1994, 1996a, 1996b; Sabato 1991) and such coverage has caused public attitudes toward candidates to degenerate from a healthy criticism to a corrosive cynicism (Mann and Ornstein 1994). Indeed, Patterson (1994) notes that public confidence in presidential candidates has declined precipitously since the 1960s and this coincides directly with increases in negative press coverage.

One difficulty in determining the effects of media use on efficacy is that efficacy is often lumped together with trust and apathy as measures of alienation or cynicism (e.g. Leshner 1996; Leshner and McKlean 1997). However, there is growing agreement among political and media scholars that alienation is a multidimensional concept and should be measured as such (Teixeira 1992; Austin and Pinkleton 1995, Capella and Jamieson 1997; Pinkleton and Austin 1998; Southwell 1985; Craig 1979). This study focuses on two of those dimensions: internal and external efficacy.

Aggregate-level studies that have directly examined how media use affects political attitudes have consistently found that newspaper use predicts increased political efficacy (Austin and Pinkleton 1997; Huang 1996; Walker 1988; Miller, Goldenberg and Erbring 1979; Becker and Preston 1969), although the relationship sometimes becomes insignificant after controlling for demographic and political variables (Kwak 1996). Others suggest the relationship between media use and efficacy may be reciprocal. Seeking out information about politics requires both time and effort and people are less likely to seek out information if they do not believe their efforts to influence government will pay off (Bandura 1986). Early studies, employing television use as its television measure, blamed television for eroding public capital (Putnam 1995) and for creating "videomalaise" (Robinson 1976, 1977). However, studies examining exposure to specific content such as television news or public affairs programming or that have employed stronger measures such as attention to television news have typically found that television news boosts political efficacy (Norris 1996; Miller and Reese 1982; O'Keefe 1980).

Not all studies have found that media use predicts political efficacy, however. Newhagen (1994) discovered that increased exposure to information sources such as newspapers and television news increased internal efficacy. However, newspaper use decreased external efficacy while television news use was unrelated to that measure. Newhagen suggested that while increased information about the politics might help someone cope with the political system, it might reinforce the belief that the political system is distant and unresponsive to people's needs. Hollander (1994) discovered that while talk radio correlated with self-efficacy, newspapers, network TV news, C-SPAN and Larry King Live were all unrelated to internal efficacy. However, Hollander's study included only one efficacy measure.

Despite the findings of Newhagen and Hollander, the bulk of the studies suggest that information sources increase efficacy.

H_3: More exposure to political news will be positively related to more exposure to political ads.

H_4: More exposure to political news will be positively related to higher levels of internal efficacy.

H_5: More exposure to political news will be positively related to higher levels of external efficacy.

Political Ads and Political Efficacy

Early studies praised the ability of political ads to convey information about candidates and their issues (Atkin and Heald 1976; Hofstetter and Buss 1980; Hofstetter, Zukin and Buss 1978; Patterson and McClure 1974) and to help voters differentiate between candidates (Faber 1992), with some studies finding that ads did a better job of presenting issue information than media coverage (Patterson and McClure 1976). However, as candidates have increasingly relied on negative ads to try to tear down their opponents, scholars question their ability to convey political information (Braima, Sothirajah and Johnson 1996; Zhao and Chaffee 1995; Zhao and Bleske 1995). Worse, negative ads can weaken support for candidates and the political system.

Negative advertising are often better remembered by voters than positive ones (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991; Garramone 1984) and they can therefore reduce support for the candidate who is targeted (Kaid and Boydston 1987). However, sometimes advertising can create a backlash effect against its sponsor (Hill 1989; Faber, Tims and Schmitt 1993), particularly when the ads attack the image rather than the issues of the targeted candidate (Roddy and Garramone 1988).

But the effects of negative ads are not limited to reducing support for candidates. Political observers charge that candidates' increasing reliance on spot advertising, particularly negative ads, to present their campaign message can increase feelings of alienation and apathy toward the political process (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Buchanan 1996; Crotty and Jacobson 1980; Diamond and Bates 1992; Dionne 1991; Wanta, Lemert and Lee 1998) and ultimately reduce the intention to vote (Ansolabehere et al. 1994). Ansolabehere and associates (1994) found that while positive ads had little influence on political efficacy, attack ads resulted in a significant drop in efficacy scores.

On the other hand, Austin and Pinkleton (1995; Austin, Bates and Pinkleton 1995) found that some aspects of political disaffection, such as negative campaigning, can enhance political efficacy as well as political participation. For instance, the "backlash" effect of negative political advertising could reflect the public's desires to reject negative information and seek positive campaign information (Austin, Bates and Pinkleton 1995; Garramone 1984). Similarly, Austin and Pinkleton (1995) found that negativism toward the election process indirectly boosted both political efficacy and voting intentions and behaviors through third-person perceptions (i.e. other people are more likely to believe campaign commercials and unscientific polls and others are more likely to be influenced by polls). However, only one of their negative campaign measures specifically examined campaign ads.

Therefore, while some studies suggest that negative advertising can boost efficacy and participation, at least in some circumstances, the bulk of the research has discovered that use of political ads reduces levels of efficacy.

H_6: More exposure to political ads will be related to lower level of external efficacy.

Political Efficacy and Political Participation

Both internal efficacy (the degree to which people believe they can influence the actions of politicians and government) and external efficacy (the degree people believe that government responds to government demands) have been considered important barometers of the health of the body politic. As Craig, Niemi and Silver (1990) note, when efficacy, along with trust, was high in the late 50s and early 60s it provided a sign that the government was stable and that it was effectively responding to the public's concerns. But as both efficacy and trust have dropped in recent decades this signaled that the public questioned whether public officials acted in their interest and whether their voices were indeed being heard by lawmakers. In particular, drops in external efficacy since the 1964 campaign demonstrate that people increasingly believe that they are on the outside looking in as policymakers, big business, well-heeled lobbyists and the media run the country (Craig 1993, 1996). As the Kettering Foundation noted in its report based on focus groups in 1990 and 1991, the people feel frustrated and apathetic because they perceive they have little control over the political system. "It is a reaction against a political system that is perceived as so autonomous that the public is no longer able to control and direct it. People talk as though our political system has been taken over by alien beings." (Harwood 1991, iii-iv.)

Political efficacy has consistently emerged as a strong predictor of political participation and voting behavior (Craig 1979; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Conway 1985; Southwell 1985; Finkel 1985; Avery 1989; Craig, Niemi and Silver 1990). Schaffer (1981) found that those high in efficacy are 20-30 percent more likely to vote than those low in efficacy. Conversely, studies suggest that close to three-fourths of the decline in voting since 1969 could be attributed to weakening party loyalties and declines in political efficacy (Teixeira 1987; Abramson and Aldrich 1982). On the other hand, when voter turnout increased from 1980 to 1984, increased feelings of political efficacy accounted for about a third of that jump (Teixeira 1987).

Those high in efficacy are joiners. They belong to more organizations in general than those low in efficacy (Almond and Verba 1963; Lane 1959) and engage in other activities such as contacting officials (Pollock III 1983). They are also more likely to join political groups and engage in campaign activities because they believe their participation can influence the election in particular and the political process in general (Craig, Niemi and Silver 1990). Therefore high levels of both internal and external efficacy are linked to increases in political participation in general and voting in particular.

H_7: Higher level of internal efficacy will be related to higher levels of external efficacy.

H_8: Higher levels of internal efficacy will be positively related to more political participation.

H_9: Higher level of internal efficacy will be positively related to greater probability of voting.

H_{10}: Higher levels of external efficacy will be positively related to political participation.

H_{11}: Higher levels of external efficacy will be positively related to greater probability of voting.

H_{12}: More political participation will be positively related to greater probability of voting.

The Model

Communication scholars have long been debating the role of the media in the political process and our democratic system. Two opposing views emerged. The first camp contends that the media play the vital role of engaging citizens in the political process by increasing the public's knowledge of the nation's affairs. The other camp, however, views it differently. The media are blamed for several social maladies including creating a sense of cynicism and apathy among citizens toward the political system. An apathetic and cynical public, in turn, tends to opt out of the democratic process. We believe that both views can be empirically supported.

The media can play a constructive role by providing citizens with adequate information of the nation's public affairs and preparing them to participate in the political process. We developed a conceptual model that highlights the process through which the media may increase the public's political efficacy and, in turn, participation in the electoral process. The model includes campaign interest, media use, political efficacy and political participation.

Initially, during an electoral campaign, the media provide the public with a panoramic view of the candidates' campaign activities, profiles, political ideologies and positions on selected issues. As the media maintain coverage of the candidates, however sporadic or intense it might be, some members of the public will develop interest in the campaign. Scholars have shown evidence of that phenomenon (Atkin, Galloway and Nayman 1976; McCombs and Mullins 1973; Tan 1980; Weaver et al. 1981). However, there is another segment of the public who is always interested in public affairs. These two segments, which may not be mutually exclusive, tend to increasingly use the media more purposefully than the less interested individuals (Austin and Pinkleton 1997; Kahihan and Chaffee 1996; Chaffee and McLeod 1973; Chaffee and Schleuder 1986; McCombs 1972). As the campaign progresses, the politically interested turn to information-rich sources to gain more political information (Pinkleton, Reagan, Aaronson and Chen 1997) and perhaps minimally ignore the information-poor sources of information such as political advertising. That is not to say that information-poor sources will be ignored by all members of the public. The less interested and involved tend to learn from information-poor sources (Patterson and McClure 1974; Hofstetter, Zukin, and Buss 1978). There is also evidence that even the politically interested tune to political ads (Faber and Storey 1984).

Individuals who use the information-rich sources of public affairs news tend to be more politically efficacious than others. Of course their interest in politics and public affairs could be determining factors. But studies have shown that newspaper use is correlated with political efficacy (Austin and Pinkleton 1997; Huang 1996; Walker 1988; Miller, Goldenberg and Erbring 1979; Becker and Preston 1969). Even in the realm of electronic media, studies examining exposure to specific content or that have employed stronger measures such as attention to news have found that television news boosts political efficacy (Norris 1996; Miller and Reese 1982; O'Keefe 1980). On the other hand, use of political advertising, particularly negative ads, may increase feelings of alienation and apathy toward the political process and ultimately reduce some individuals' probability to vote (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Buchanan 1996; Crotty and Jacobson 1980; Diamond and Bates 1992; Dionne 1991; Wanta, Lemert and Lee 1998).

A sense of political efficacy provides people with an urge to participate in the political process because they believe they can influence the political system and that the government responds to their needs. Therefore, both internal efficacy (the degree to which people believe they can influence the actions of politicians and government) and external efficacy (the degree people believe that government responds to government demands) lead people to participate in campaign activities and ultimately visit the voting booth.

METHOD

The Sample

The sample was drawn from a telephone survey of adult residents of Pulaski County in Arkansas. Trained undergraduate students enrolled in a research methods for the social sciences course conducted the interviews. The telephone numbers were selected from local exchanges using random digit dialing techniques. The interviews were conducted from October 26 to November 4, 1996. There were 362 usable questionnaires with a response rate of 56.3%. No attempt to sample within the household was made.

Measurement of Latent Constructs

Campaign interest: One item was asked of respondents: On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is absolutely not interested and 10 is absolutely interested, how interested are you in the national election campaigns?

Political news and political ads exposure: The items were borrowed from Atwood (1991). For political news exposure the items were: (a) How much have you read or heard about the presidential election campaigns within the last month or so in newspapers? (b) from television? (c) from radio? and (d) in magazines? For political ads exposure the items were: How much have you read or heard about the presidential election campaigns within the last month or so in television political commercials? (b) radio political commercials? (c) newspaper political ads? and (d) magazine political ads?

The constructs of political news and political ads exposure variables were measured on a Likert type scale: A great deal (5), Quite a bit (4), Some (3), A little (2) and Nothing at all (1). Similarly, internal and external efficacy indices were measured on a Likert type scale: Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly disagree (1).

Internal and external efficacy: The items were borrowed from several scholars who modified the National Election Studies of the Survey Research Center (SRC), at the University of Michigan, measures of political efficacy (Balch 1974; Coleman and Davis 1976; Lane 1959; McPherson, Miller, Welch and Clark 1977). Respondents were asked: Please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements about politics: (a) Public officials don't care about what people like me think; (b) Voting is the only way that people like me can have any say about how government runs things; (c) Every vote counts in an election including yours and mine; (d) Most of the time we can trust our government to do what's right; and (e) In America, everyone who wants to has a voice in what the government does. Items (a) and (b) were used as measures of internal efficacy, while the other items were used as indicators of external efficacy.

Political participation: Respondents were asked four questions about their political participation during the national election campaigns: Of the following political activities, in which one have you participated during this national election campaigns? (a) Wore a campaign button; (b) Gave money to one of the political candidates; (c) Made telephone calls, distributed literature, attended a rally etc. for a candidate; and (d) Tried to persuade someone to vote as you would.

Voting intention: Respondents were asked three questions regarding their likelihood to vote: (a) On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 indicates absolutely not and 10 indicates absolutely certain, what are the chances you are going to vote this year? (b) What are the chances you are going to vote if the weather is really bad? (c) What are the chances you are going to vote if you are really busy?

Analysis

The measured indicators of each construct were summed up to create indices. Then a correlation matrix was calculated (See Table 1). LISREL 7 was used to fit the proposed model to the data. The model in Figure 1 was estimated by analyzing the covariance matrix of the measured variables and producing maximum-likelihood estimates of the parameters in structural equation models (Joreskog and Sorbom 1989). Causal paths between campaign interest and political news exposure and political ads exposure are assessed by γ_{11} and γ_{21}, while β's assess the causal paths among the endogenous constructs.

Table 1 About Here

RESULTS

Overall Fit of the Model

Assessing the adequacy of the tested model is accomplished by examining the results of measures of overall fit. The model fit the data very well (See Table 2). Despite the fact that the chi-square is significant at .011, the model represents a good fit to the data. The chi-square test assesses the fit between observed covariance (S) and implied covariance (Σ) and hence provides an omnibus test of the model and the estimates of its free coefficients (Hayduck 1987). As Chaffee and Roser (1986) point out, however, with large sample sizes, obtaining nonsignificant chi-squares are almost impossible. Large sample sizes tend to produce significant χ^2, like other tests of significance, not because the fit between S and Σ is bad, but because even smaller differences are considered more than mere sampling fluctuations (Hayduck 1987). When we ran the data with a sample size of 200 respondents, the results were more telling ($\chi^2 = 10.00$, $df = 7$, $p = .181$). Also the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom has been used to determine the adequacy of the fit. Some researchers suggest that a ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom of 5 or less is an indication of an acceptable fit (Chaffee and Roser 1986; Hayduck 1987). For the tested model the ratio was 2.27.

A second measure of overall fit is the Goodness-Of-Fit Index (GFI = .986) which indicates the relative amount of variance and covariance explained by the model. The Adjusted Goodness-Of-Fit Index (AGFI = .944) is the former index adjusted for the degrees of freedom of the model. Generally, the closer the GFI and AGFI to 1.0, the better the fit of the model. Our results indicate a very good fit.

The third measure of overall fit is the Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) which is the average of the fitted residuals. The elements of the fitted residuals are the difference between sample covariance and implied covariance ($S - \Sigma$) (Joreskog and Sorbom 1989). The general rule of thumb is that a Root Mean Square Residual of less than .05 represents a very good fit. For the model, Root Mean Square Residual was .041. All these are indicators of a very good fit (Joreskog and Sorbom 1989).

Table 2 About Here

Model Estimates

An examination of the solution is largely determined by assessing the estimated path coefficients of the model. We developed 12 hypotheses for the study and expected them to be significantly different from zero at the 0.05 level. Only two hypotheses, that campaign interest will predict exposure to political ads (.01) and political participation will predict voting intention (-.09), were not statistically different from zero.

Table 3 presents the completely standardized maximum likelihood estimates for the model which show the structural paths confirm all the other remaining hypotheses. Campaign interest predicts political news exposure and internal efficacy (.57). Although the latter influence of campaign interest was not hypothesized by the model, the finding supports earlier studies (Conway 1991; Teixeira 1992). Political news exposure predicts exposure to political ads (.66), internal efficacy (.12) and external efficacy (.22). Political ads exposure is negatively linked to external efficacy (-.27), and unrelated to internal efficacy. Internal efficacy, on the other hand, positively predicts external efficacy (.22) and political participation (.44), while external efficacy predicts political participation (.32). Both internal efficacy and external efficacy predict voting intention by (.17) and (.12), respectively. Another unexpected finding is that political participation has a reciprocal negative link with internal efficacy (-.40).

Figure 2 & Table 3 About Here

DISCUSSION

Media scholars and critics and political observers bemoan the fact that the public is becoming increasingly disenchanted and cynical about public officials and the media that cover them, and that people are disengaged from a political process which they believe they have little influence over and does not operate in their interest. Voter turnout in the 1996 campaign reached its lowest level since 1924, and the media were blamed for not involving the public in the election process (Bennet 1996; Cleghorn 1996; Diamond, Shepnich and Stenzler 1996; Grossberger 1996). This study investigated what role the media can play in reinvigorating the public's participation in the political process.

Generally, the test of the model shown in Figure 1 suggests that individuals who have developed an interest in the electoral campaign are more likely to expose themselves to information-rich media content such as political news and are less likely to expose themselves to information-poor content such as political ads. Although the model hypothesized that individuals who were interested in the campaign would search out information from a variety of sources, including campaign ads, the finding that campaign interest was not related to political ads is not isolated. Previous studies suggest that those who are more interested in the campaign are more likely to seek out campaign information than the less interested (Tan 1980; Atkin, Galloway and Nayman 1976; McCombs and Mullins 1973; Weaver et al. 1981) and they will turn to newspapers and other information rich sources because they have more political information (Pinkleton and Austin 1998; Chew 1994; Culbertson and Stempel 1986; McLeod and Becker 1981; Tan 1980). On the other hand, research suggests the less involved voters learn more about the campaign from political ads (Patterson and McClure 1974; Hofstetter, Zukin, and Buss 1978).

The model also suggests that information-rich content such as political news boosts both internal efficacy (the degree to which people believe they can influence the actions of politicians and the government) and external efficacy (the degree to which people perceive the government responds to the public's demands). However, exposure to political ads is more likely to reduce external efficacy and is not related to external efficacy according to this model. These findings are tantamount to claiming that the media don't necessarily alienate the public, but rather it is the type of content carried by the media that is responsible for the "videomalaise" phenomenon. These findings support numerous previous studies that found evidence media use, particularly political news, boosts political efficacy (Becker and Preston 1969; Huang 1996; Miller and Reese 1982; Miller, Goldenberg and Erbring 1979; Norris 1996; O'Keefe 1980; Austin and Pinkleton 1997; Walker 1988). Previous studies also found that reliance on spot advertising, particularly negative ads, has the potential to increase feelings of alienation and apathy toward the political process (Wanta, Lemert and Lee 1998; Buchanan 1996; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Diamond and Bates 1992; Dionne 1991; Crotty and Jacobson 1980). Specifically, Ansolabehere and associates (1994) found while positive ads had little influence on political efficacy, attack ads resulted in a significant drop in efficacy scores.

Most importantly, the model strongly suggest that both internal efficacy (the degree to which people believe they can influence the actions of politicians and the government) and external efficacy (the degree to which people perceive the government responds to the public's demands) lead to political participation and intention to vote. Previous studies support the claims that efficacious individuals are more likely to engage in campaign activities (Craig, Niemi and Silver 1990) and contact officials (Pollock III 1983). However, the model also suggests that the politically active during the 1996 electoral campaign were less likely to be internally efficacious and that they were less likely to believe they could influence the actions of politicians and the government.

This apparent contradiction that the politically active were also less likely to believe that they could influence the political process may have emerged due to nature of the 1996 campaign. Election surveys offer ample evidence that the public was dissatisfied with the candidates and the course of the 1996 campaign. Only half of the voters said they were satisfied with the candidates in 1996, down from 61 percent in 1992. The public's rating of all the major institutions in the campaign—the press, the pollsters, the parties and the andidates—dropped from 1992 (Pew Research Center 1996). Only a quarter of the American people paid close attention to the campaign (Pew Research Center 1996). Worse 73 percent said they were bored by the campaign (Kurtz 1996) and nearly half said the election would not make a difference in their life (Ullmann 1996). Consequently, voter turnout fell below 50 percent, the lowest total since 1924. In this noxious atmosphere of voter apathy and dissatisfaction where the election appeared over even before it began, it is not surprising that even the politically active would give up hope of getting Bob Dole in the White House.

Generally, then, the model provided strong empirical evidence that individuals who are interested in an electoral campaign are more likely to use information-rich content of the media while ignoring the information-poor content. It follows, then, that to the extent that the media succeed in arousing the public's interest in the electoral campaign, the media can help the public become efficacious and eventually participate in the political process of the nation. The use of information-rich content of the media will, in turn, enhance the public's internal and external efficacy. Therefore, to the extent that people make use of the information-rich media such as political news they tend to be more efficacious, and to the extent that they use information-poor media such as political ads, they tend to be less efficacious. And that politically efficacious public is more likely to participate in the political process thus preserving our democratic system. Evidently, the role of the media in democracy should not be underestimated.

This study was conducted during a lackluster campaign that did not capture the attention of either the media or the public. Campaign interest is bound to jump in the 2000 election. The race will not feature an incumbent, making it likely the public will witness a more competitive race. Future studies should compare results from the 2000 and 1996 election to determine whether the media's impact on the election process can be enhanced.

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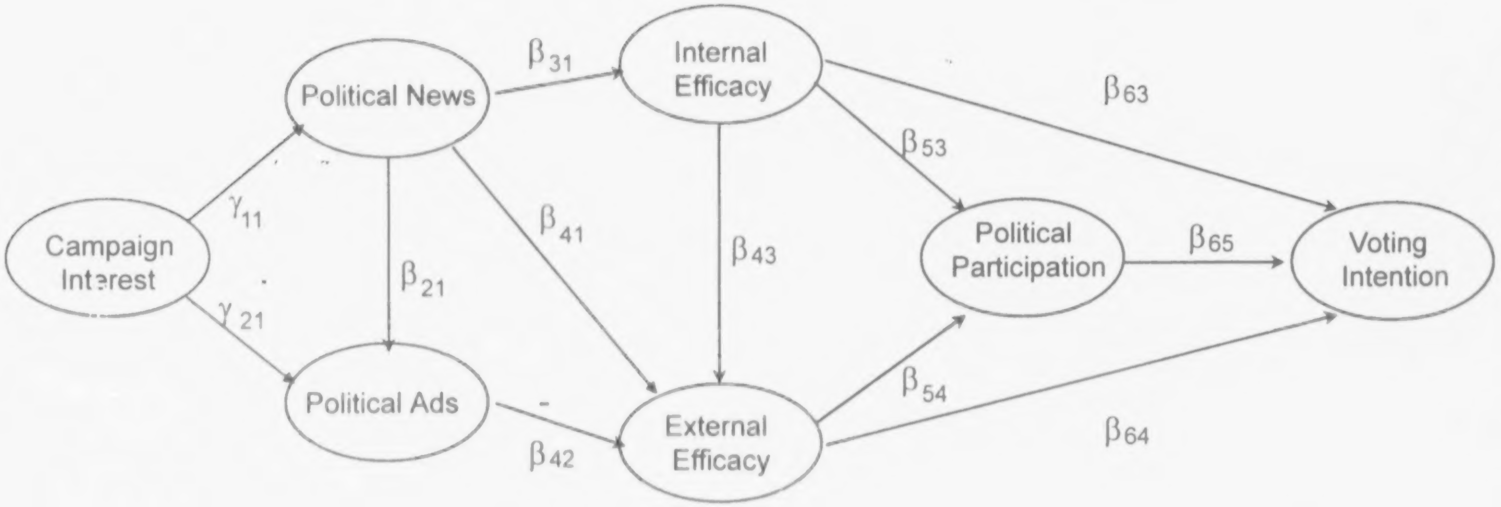
Campaign Interest
Political News
Political Ads
Internal Efficacy
External Efficacy
Political Participation
Voting Intention
γ11
γ21
β21
β31
β41
β42
-
β43
β53
β54
β63
β64
β65

Figure 1: An Efficacy Model of Electoral Campaigns

Table 1
Correlation Matrix of the Variables

Political News	Political Ads	Internal Efficacy	External Efficacy	Political Participation	Voting Intention	Campaign Interest
1.0000						
.6578	1.0000					
.1581	.1037	1.0000				
.0838	-.0963	.1293	1.0000			
.1794	.1215	.1356	.2970	1.0000		
.1156	.0648	.1699	.1193	-.0301	1.0000	
.1860	.1343	.4962	.1444	.2373	.2178	1.0000

Table 2
Goodness of Fit Estimates

Parameter	Estimate
χ^2 (N=362)	18.14
Degrees of Freedom	7
χ^2 / df	2.591
Probability	.011
χ^2 (N=200)	10.00
Probability	.181
Goodness of Fit Index	.986
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index	.944
Root Mean Square Residual	.041

Table 3
Test of the Model of Political Efficacy During a Presidential Campaign

Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	T-Value
β_{21} Political News – Political Ads	.66	.040	16.57
β_{31} Political News – Internal Efficacy	.12	.052	2.42
β_{41} Political News – External Efficacy	.22	.069	3.25
β_{42} Political Ads – External Efficacy	-.27	.068	3.91
β_{43} Internal Efficacy – External Efficacy	.22	.051	3.61
β_{53} Political Participation – Internal Efficacy	.44	.099	4.38
β_{35} Political Participation - Internal Efficacy	-.40	.106	3.79
β_{54} External Efficacy – Political Participation	.32	.060	5.32
β_{63} Internal Efficacy – Voting Intention	.17	.052	3.18
β_{64} External Efficacy – Voting Intention	.12	.054	2.29
β_{65} Political Participation – Voting Intention	-.09	.054	1.65
γ_{11} Campaign Interest – Political News	.19	.052	3.59
γ_{21} Campaign Interest – Political Ads	.01	.040	.31
γ_{31} Campaign Interest – Internal Efficacy	.57	.057	9.97

Don't Look At *Me*!

Third-person Effect and Television Violence

by

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Introduction

The effects of violent television content have raised many public health concerns in the United States for decades. Many organizations, including the American Medical Association, American Psychological Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and parent-teacher associations, have been vocal about the portrayal of violence on television and potentially deleterious effects on cognitive development, attitudes and behaviors ("Believe," 1994; Comstock & Strasburger, 1993; Krumplitsch & Brower, 1993; Lasorsa et al., 1998; Singer & Singer, 1998; Stapleton, 1997). "People fear television's potential influence because it is hard to believe that so much viewing can have no effect" (Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1998, p. 138). The concern about television content, most notably violence, tends to be on how it may affect *other* people, particularly children.

Research has shown that there may be a general acceptance that the media have broad societal effects but less acknowledgment that the media have individual, personal effects (Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1998; Hamilton, 1998a, 1998b; Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice, & Rosenfeld, 1991). This concept is known as the third-person effect, the idea that "people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitudes of others" (Davison, 1983, p. 3) regardless of whether the communication is intended to be persuasive or not. "[I]ts greatest impact will not be on 'me' or 'you,' but on 'them' — the third persons" (p. 3). The perception of personal immunity to the power of television may be detrimental, making individuals more apt to be influenced by television content (Silverblatt, 1995).

The purpose of this paper is to assess the role of the third-person effect on people's attitudes and reactions toward television violence. Quantitative data were collected through a statewide poll in North Carolina to identify concerns, attitudes and behaviors regarding the effect of television violence on individual respondents and perceptions of TV violence effects on others. Sorting through these multifaceted factors may shed some light on the complex television violence issues and provide additional insight into the theory building of the third-person effect.

Effects of Television and Its Violent Content

Nearly all homes in the United States have at least one television (Nielsen, 1998), and about nine years of a person's waking hours will be spent in front of the television. Violent content has increased on both network and cable television channels, and more than half of all television programming includes violence (Federman, 1998; Shelton, 1998). Definitions of violent television depiction vary, but most refer to physical force and harmful acts, consequences of unseen acts and threats of violence (Federman, 1998; Potter et al., 1998).

Studies spanning several decades point to the potential effects television can have on physiological, psychological and social growth. Excessive television viewing has been linked to deferred development and learning problems, and violent television content has been related to aggressive attitudes and behaviors in both children and adults (Brown, 1998; Kubey, 1998; LimiTV, 1998; Schwartz, 1990). More than 1,000 studies by academic researchers, interest groups, and government agencies during the last four decades have documented a relationship between the amount of violence viewed on TV and aggressive behavior (See, for example, Comstock & Strasburger, 1993; Fenley et al., 1993; Kist, 1996; Kunkel, 1998; Media violence, 1995; Shelton, 1998; Strasburger, 1997). Children, teens and adults who view more television violence tend to exhibit more aggressiveness, show indifference or desensitization toward violence, and may view the world as scarier than it really is (Comstock & Strasburger, 1993; Federman, 1998; Gelman, 1993; Gerbner, 1992; Harris, 1992; Huesmann & Moise, 1996; Wilson et al., 1998a). Additionally, the context of television's violent acts has been emphasized in communication studies. Researchers have examined how violence is glamorized, whether consequences for the victims (pain/suffering) and perpetrator (punishment) are explored and if alternative options to violence are considered (Federman, 1998; Kist, 1996; Shelton, 1998; Silver, 1995; Stapleton, 1997). Evidence suggests that television violence that is portrayed as negative behavior and includes punishment and consequences may reduce serious, adverse societal outcomes (Federman, 1998). In order to better understand the issue of television violence, it is important to identify who the most avid viewers are, who is most concerned, and who takes action to avoid violent content.

Young adults tend to watch less TV overall but view more violence than older adults. The most avid viewers of television violence are 18-34-year-olds, according to data collected by Times Mirror (Hamilton, 1998b). Men in this age category reported being the heaviest viewers of TV violence (73 %), although women of the same age also tend to be heavy violence viewers (60 %). Coincidentally, this age group is the prime target for advertisers, which, according to Hamilton (1998a), makes violent content a highly charged economic issue. "The willingness of sponsors to pay more for young adult viewers translates into greater incentives to program violent content" (p. 51). Also considered heavy consumers of violent TV content are men, minorities and less educated adults.

Despite high viewership and advertising support, the vast majority of Americans report being concerned about the amount of violence on TV. Violent programs received lower Nielsen ratings by women, high income and high education adults and parents, and nearly three-quarters of those surveyed by Times Mirror said there was too much violence on television (Hamilton, 1998a). Eighty percent of adults reported in a Corporation for Public Broadcasting survey that they felt television programs were "very violent," and 93 % reported they watched TV less because of the violent content ("Believe," 1994). A Mediaweek survey in 1993 reported that 62 % of adults polled found the violent and sexual content on TV programs to be offensive. Women (72 %) were more likely to be offended than men (51 %) and whites (63 %) more than African Americans (52 %). Older adults also were concerned with the amount of TV violence and the negative effects it may have on society (Hamilton, 1998a). Sixty-four percent of parents with children less than the age of 12 were also displeased with television content (Krumplitsch & Brower, 1993). Many parents are concerned about "shield[ing] their children from damaging content" (Wilson et al., 1998b, p. 105. See also Cantor, Harrison & Krcmar, 1998).

Many adults reported taking action to avoid viewing violence. Hamilton's (1998a) analysis of Nielsen ratings data found that "parents with children may avoid watching violent programming themselves as part of a way to shield their children from violent content" (p. 82). Parents also reported taking other actions including changing the television channel, turning off the television set, restricting the amount and content viewed by children and monitoring child viewing. Most households (79 %) reportedly have instituted TV-viewing rules regarding amount and content (Shelton, 1996).

Nielsen ratings data showed that women and parents in upper level income brackets were more likely to change the channel to prevent a child from viewing violent TV content. Although more educated adults have reported having a greater concern about violent content (Hamilton, 1998a; Wu & Boynton, 1998), it was parents in the lower education bracket that were more likely to change the channel, according to the Nielsen data. No statistical significance was found with political affiliation – both Democrats and Republicans expressed similar concerns that there is too much violence on TV. However, Republicans were slightly more likely to report that violence affected society than Democrats (Hamilton, 1998a). Further understanding of television violence effects may be achieved by examining how individuals perceive these effects on themselves and others.

Third-person effect: The third-person effect hypothesis suggests that individuals presume they are personally less influenced by mass communication messages than other people (Davison, 1983; 1996). This difference may be a factor of overestimating the effects on others and/or underestimating the effects on the self (Gunther, 1991; Gunther & Thorsen, 1992). In addition to affecting perception, the third-person effect also may influence an individual's behavior, especially when anticipating what other people might do when faced with persuasive messages (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Davison, 1983; Perloff, 1993). Several features have emerged.

First, the third-person effect surfaces when individuals perceive a message to be harmful to society at large (Gunther & Mundy, 1993). Such negative or undesirable messages that have been studied include defamatory or libelous news stories, censorship of pornography and violence, antisocial rap lyrics, attack-style campaign advertisements and anti-government propaganda (See Davison, 1983; Lasorsa, 1989; McLeod, Eveland & Nathanson, 1997; Rojas, Shah & Faber, 1996; Salwen & Driscoll, 1997). Further, studies have shown that when individuals assume they are more resistant and less affected by media messages than the general audience, they may be willing to censor what they consider to be "'dangerous' or 'deviant' messages" (Rojas, Shah & Faber, 1996, p. 181).

Second, the perceived importance of the message may be an influential factor. Mutz (1989) found an increased third-person effect when an issue or topic was considered significant to the individual; personal relevance is linked to perceived knowledge about the issue. People who consider themselves well-informed on an issue or topic saw media as less likely to have an impact on them personally (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Lasorsa, 1989; Price, Huang & Tewksbury, 1997; Price & Tewksbury, 1996). The respondent's education level has not been a consistent predictor of the third-person effect. In some studies (Lasorsa, 1989; Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice & Rosenfeld, 1991), the more educated respondents were more likely to infer a third-person effect; however, Salwen (1998) found that education was not a significant predictor of any perceived media effects, on self or others. Additionally, when people reported using media for surveillance purposes (gaining knowledge), they were more likely to identify a higher level of a third-person effect (Price et al., 1997). Therefore the education factor might be worthwhile re-examining.

Third, several demographic characteristics have been identified as indicators of the third-person effect. Older people tend to believe others are more influenced by media than they are (Lasorsa, 1989; Tiedge et al., 1991). Conservatives reported fewer effects on themselves, particularly when respondents had a personal interest in the issue or topic (Price et al., 1997), and a greater willingness to censor media content (McLeod, Eveland & Nathanson, 1997).

In addition to perception of TV violence effects, it is important to consider resulting behaviors. Many studies that predict or explain human behavior stem from social psychology, particularly the concept of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Assuming people are rational, scholars have maintained that a person's attitude toward a specific subject can predict his or her action on it. There are intervening factors, including social norms (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), value systems (Stern et al., 1995), and habits (Triandis, 1980), that could intervene, however. In the health communication field, many studies have provided guidance in predicting health-enhancing behaviors, such as adopting the use of condoms (e.g., Albarracin, Fishbein & Middlestadt, 1998). Although studies has shown that TV violence can have public health consequences, often times the importance of freedom of expression and artistic liberty take precedence (e.g., Rojas et al., 1996; Salwen, 1998; Salwen & Driscoll, 1997).

Some psychological concepts have been investigated to help explain why such perceptions and behaviors may occur. Optimism bias or unrealistic optimism (Brosius &

Engel, 1996; Gunther & Mundy, 1993) could lead individuals to assume bad things are not likely to happen to them, and they may feel they are immune to negative or persuasive effects of media. This also might lead to a self-serving bias (Brown, 1986), which places an individual in a position of superiority for ego reasons. An assumption is made that the individual is better or smarter than others because media do not affect him. Additionally, the third-person effect may reflect paternalism as a means of protecting society from negative or potentially harmful messages. This often leads to support of message restriction including media censorship (Gunther, 1995; Salwen, 1998). Finally, when there is a greater perceived social status difference between the respondent and other persons, a third-person effect is more likely to be found (Brosius & Engel, 1996; White, 1997).

The literature reveals that there are several potential predictors of third-person effect attitudes and behaviors toward media in general, and some progress has been made in identifying predictors of the third-person effect regarding detrimental messages. It remains important to continue evaluating this multifaceted effect that involves both self-perceptions and perceptions of others (Brosius & Engel, 1996) in order to better understand the concerns, effects, perceptions and actions regarding television violence. This is particularly important for characteristics with mixed results, such as education level of respondent, as well as those not extensively tested, including religiosity. Moreover, this study may contribute to the theory building of the third-person effect by exploring a key communication genre prevalent in our society.

Research Questions

This study focused on three related issues: (1) concern about violent television content, (2) reaction toward viewing of television violence; and (3) the perceived third-person effect regarding television violence. The following questions and hypotheses were posed:

Question 1: How will people perceive television violence's effects on themselves and others?

H1a: Considerably more people will perceive others to be more affected by television violence than themselves.

Question 2: If a third-person effect is evident regarding perceived influence of television violence, which people are most likely to presume others are more affected by violent TV content than themselves? Based on the trends revealed in previous studies, the following hypotheses are proposed to identify what may contribute to the distinction between a third-person effect and a first-person or equal effect:

H2a: A third-person effect will be more prevalent for respondents who consider TV violence to be harmful.

H2b: A third-person effect will be more prevalent for respondents who consider media violence to be an important issue. These persons will include women, parents, frequent church-goers, whites, conservatives, and people in higher income brackets.

H2c: Older respondents also are expected to perceive others to be more affected by violent content than themselves.

H2d: Those with higher education also are expected to perceive a greater third-person effect because of an intellectual superiority (self-serving) bias.

Question 3: Who is more likely to respond the violent programming?

H3a: Assuming that action may follow attitude, it is hypothesized that people with a high level of concern about TV violence, and those who see themselves and others affected by violent programming, will be more likely to avoid violent TV content.

H3b: Additionally, it is expected that women, parents, those with higher levels of education and frequent church-goers will more likely report avoiding violent media content.

Method

A telephone survey was employed to analyze people's attitudes and behaviors regarding television violence. Four questions addressing attitudes and behaviors regarding television violence and perceived effects on self and others were incorporated into a university-sponsored telephone survey administered to North Carolina adults in Fall 1998 (See Appendix A for specific question wording). The poll is conducted twice annually by a large southeastern university to capture the public's opinion on various social and political issues. Undergraduate and graduate students at the university received training in telephone survey techniques prior to working as interviewers. The Computer Assisted Telephone Instrument (CATI) was used to implement the survey and also tally responses. The interview sample was drawn from across the state of North Carolina with a random digit dialing technique, and a total of 584 residential respondents completed the survey. The sampling error rate was 3.5 %, at a 95 % confidence level. Results generated from the four survey questions were examined to determine what factors might influence the level of concern toward television violence and to what degree television violence is perceived to affect individuals and others.

A calculation employed by Atwood (1994) was used to create a third-person effect variable. Three effects groups were identified using two survey variables—how respondents perceived violence to affect themselves ("self" variable) and how they perceived violence to affect other people ("others" variable). Respondents who perceived other people to be more affected by TV violence than themselves were assigned a score of 3. Respondents who perceived an equal effect on themselves and others were assigned a score of 2. Those respondents who perceived themselves to be more affected by TV violence than other people were assigned a score of 1.

First, a correlation matrix was generated to survey what factors might be associated with the level of perceived personal and public television effects. The correlating variables include the following categories: (1) general demographic (gender, race, age, income, education, and parental status); (2) sociopolitical attitudes (political leaning and church attendance); and (3) concerns level about television violence. All of the independent variables were regressed into statistical models to examine their contribution to respondent's estimated impact, concern level, and reaction toward television violence. Stepwise method was used to explore and reach the best fit models.

In order to detect -- and possibly distinguish – the attributes of the third-person effect group and the first-person and equal effect group, respectively, discriminant analysis was executed. The method was appropriate for this study because the dependent variable – the third-person effect versus other effect grouping – is a categorical variable. It must be noted that the first-person effect and equal effect categories were grouped together because there are less than ten respondents who demonstrated first-person effect, which does not meet the fundamental assumptions of conducting discriminant analysis. Stepwise strategy aiming to maximize the Mahalanobis distance was used to extract potential functions from the demographic, sociopolitical, and attitudinal variables.

Findings

General characteristics of the sample: Analysis of race and age confirmed that the poll sample generally reflected the structure of the North Carolina population, although there were more female respondents (63 %) than males. Among those interviewed, 20.9 % were minorities. The largest age group was 25-44-year-olds, constituting 39.5 % of the sample, followed by 45-64-year-olds, representing 34.3 %. Forty-one percent of the respondents had completed at least the 12th grade; 32% have received college or graduate/professional degrees. A total of 65.6 % reported they were parents, and 42.5 % indicated that had children under the age of 16 living at home.

Republicans comprised 32.2 % of the sample, and 35.5 % considered themselves to be conservatives. Thirty-one percent indicated they were affiliated with the Democratic party, and 26.1 % with the Independent party. Slightly more than 16 % considered themselves liberals and 26.2 % said they were moderates. Thirty-two percent of the sample stated they attended religious services every week, and 14.7 % attended services more than once a week. Twelve percent reported never attending church, followed closely by those who attended church several times a year (11.9 %) and two-to-three times per month (11.5 %).

Overall attitude toward television violence: About half of the respondents reported that they are very concerned about TV violence; 31 % said that they are somewhat concerned, and only 16 % reported they are not concerned about the issue. Similar to earlier studies (Hamilton, 1998a, 1998b; Krumplitsch & Brower, 1993; Wu & Boynton, 1998), factors that were identified as contributing to concern were age, gender, religiosity, political attitude and parent status (See also Figure 1). In this study, it was confirmed that generally older adults, women, conservatives, parents, and those who attend church frequently are most concerned about violence on television.

Despite this rather high level of concern about TV violence, only 21 % of respondents reported that they were influenced by violent programming; 77 % denied that TV violence affected them personally. The opinion changed dramatically when respondents were asked about the impact of TV violence on other people. Nearly three in four people claimed that TV violence does exert some level of influence on other people; only about 17 % said that TV violence does not influence other people at all.

As predicted in H1, it seems apparent that the third-person effect is supported, according to the noticeable discrepancy between the estimates of the influence of TV violence. Respondents' mean estimate of the impact on others (mean=1.57 on a 4-point scale, with 1 the highest impact) is statistically different from their mean estimate of impact on themselves [mean =2.6, t (570)=31.205, p<.001].

Effects on self and others: The correlation matrix indicates that the assessments of influence on the self and others are associated with similar demographic variables. Both estimates are related to church attendance, age, and gender – the more frequent church-goers, older adults, and women – tend to sense the effects of TV violence. In addition, both estimates are positively linked to respondents' concern level about TV violence. However, there are some variables that are only associated with one effect or the other. People with higher education degrees are less likely to report TV violence's impact on themselves. People who claim violent programming influences other people tend to be parents and appear to be politically conservative. A thorough examination of various predictors' influence over the estimates of violence influence – regression analyses – follows.

Table 1 shows that two predictors contribute to people's assessment of television violence's effect on themselves. The first determinant, as the model indicates, is people's concern level – the more concerned they are about television violence, the more likely they feel its impact on themselves. Secondly, age seems to play a decisive role in the regression model too – the older respondents said they feel television violence exerts some influence on them personally.

Table 1. about here.

The regression model of TV violence's effect on others presents a somewhat different story (see Table 2). The primary factor in predicting respondent's estimate of impact is still their concern level. Gender also significantly contributes to the assessment of violence's impact on others – women are more likely to report high estimation of violence's impact on other people.

Table 2. about here.

Figure 1 about here

The second research question addresses the factors influencing the third-person differential – the difference between the estimates of TV violence's impact on self and others. Unlike the two individual impact estimates, the third-person estimate is not significantly related to any of the demographic or attitudinal variables tested in the correlation model. To analyze this issue further, the researchers employed the discriminant analysis method to explore the demographic and attitudinal factors that might contribute to the distinction respondents made regarding a third-person effect and a first-person or equal effect. Variables included are gender, income, parenthood, education, church attendance, age, race, political attitude, frequency of turning off TV, and concern toward TV violence. Stepwise method was used to extract the potential function that can maximally distinguish the two groups of respondents.

Unfortunately, the result turns out unfruitful, indicating that the difference between the third-person effect and first-person or equal effect is not statistically significant. In other words, the characteristics and attitudes of those people who are prone to a third-person effect of TV violence cannot be differentiated from the other people who estimate otherwise. This result demonstrates that people's demographic and sociopolitical attributes may not predict the tendency of the third-person effect when the television violence issue is involved. Hence, hypotheses H2a-d regarding demographic influences on the third-person effect are not supported by this study.

Actions against TV violence: We also were interested in investigating which respondents are more likely to "pull the plug" on television violence, putting their beliefs into action by changing the television channel or turning the television off. The regression analysis identified four action predictors ($R^2 = .343$), exemplifying findings over the last few decades. The results fall in the upper level of explained variance in predicting behavior, which Sutton's (1998) meta-analytical study found to be between 19% and 38%. As Table 3 indicates, concern level, once again, emerges as the principal predictor in discontinuing violent programming. The next most likely predictor is the perceived effect of TV violence on other people, followed closely by parental status. This may illustrate the discretion and screening of TV content in the households with children. Lastly, high-income families also are more likely to turn off their TV sets than are low-income counterparts, which might indicate that people in the high-income bracket tend to shun violence and switch to other, readily available entertainment outlets. These results support portions of H3a and H3b. Assumptions regarding actions by women, frequent church-goers and higher educated adults were not supported.

Table 3. about here.

The complete causal model of turning off TV is presented in Figure 1. As this model shows, five demographic and attitudinal characteristics lead to concern about TV violence. Older adults, women, frequent church-goers, conservatives and parents are most concerned about the amount of violence on television. Women and those concerned about TV's violent content are most likely to perceive others affected by the violence. The four factors that lead respondents to avoid TV violence by changing the channel or turning off the television are concern about the issue, perceived influence on others, parental status and higher income bracket.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results regarding concern about television violence and certain aspects of media effects replicated some of the findings generated by earlier studies; however, some outcomes regarding the third-person effect were puzzling. Many North Carolinians are concerned about the amount of violent programming on television, and a majority of those polled perceive a greater degree of TV influence on others than themselves, overall indicating a third-person effect. The extent to which a person is concerned with TV violence is, in sync with earlier studies (Hamilton, 1998a, 1998b; Krumplitsch & Brower, 1993; Wu & Boynton, 1998), determined by age, gender, religiosity, and political stance. Those people most concerned about TV violence, as well as parents and higher-income adults, are more likely to perceive such content to have an effect on themselves as well as others.

Two North Carolina media education professionals requested to comment indicated these finding reflect what they experience in workshops. They stated that the people most interested in the topic of television violence effects are the ones most likely to attend media education workshops. Whitney Vanderwerff of The National Alliance for Non-violent Programming, Greensboro, NC, said women are more likely to be concerned about the effects of violent TV content than men. "It's very rare that parents agree" about the extent of effects, she said (personal communication, 3 December 1998). The difference between male and female value systems may contribute to their varied levels of concern about TV violence and its effects on others. Women generally have a higher level of ethic of care than men, which is based on social psychology's postulation of gender differences in moral reasoning – women emphasize human relationships and men adhere to abstract moral principles. Gilligan (1982) suggested that the value structures of men and women may be different.

Although it has, once again, been shown that perceived effects on others exceed the perceived effects on self, the discriminate analysis of a third-person effect vs. first-person or equal effect did not result in any conclusive findings. The analysis suggests that the third-person effect may exist for the issue of television violence; however, it is difficult to discern and predict who is most likely to exhibit this effect. This may reflect the tendency of respondents to overestimate the effect of media on others and underestimate the effect on themselves (Gunther, 1991; Gunther & Thorsen, 1992). Additionally, the media educators (Jurovics, 1998; Vanderwerff, 1998) noted that there may not be a clear understanding by the public of what constitutes television violence effects. While some people perceive aggressive behavior or use of abusive language to be effects of viewing violent TV programming, many do not consider desensitization and fear as valid effects, at least initially. When informed of the breadth of television effects, more workshop attendees have admitted to personal effects. Hence, education about the extent of TV violence effects may have an influence on these perceptions. Second, it is important to note that concern about television violence is an important predictor for both effect on self and effect on others. This may have some influence on the lack of distinction in the discriminant analysis.

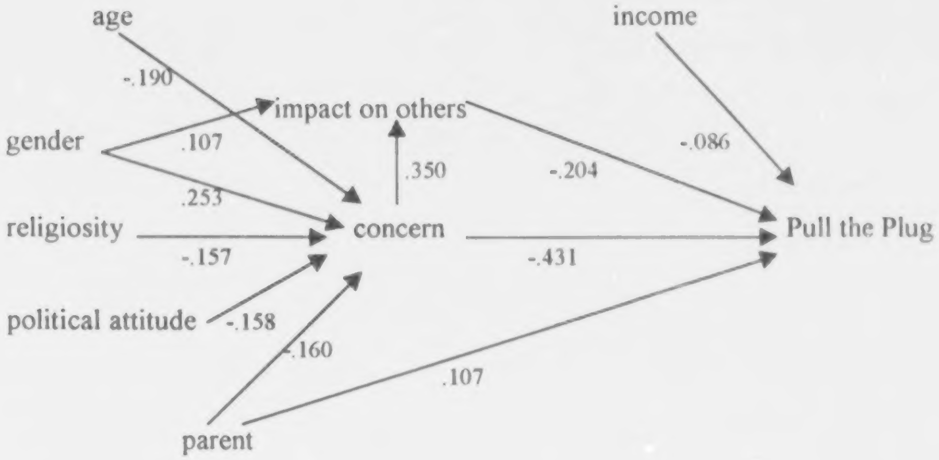
It also is worthwhile to point out the differences between this study and other studies that demonstrated the third-person effect (See, for example, Mason, 1995; Price et al., 1997). The first distinction is that other studies might have used specific segment of the population either directly influenced by purposively selected information or expected to know far more about a given issue as a baseline group. Although this study was limited to attitudes and behaviors of North Carolinians only, it would not be expected that any particular segment of this study sample would be more affected by television violence than others. Additionally, the researchers did not target the people who are especially concerned about the issue.

Another dissimilarity that might have contributed to the lack of findings to support the third-person effect is the level of acceptability of television violence. Pornography, racist information and hate speech are, perhaps, more socially undesirable than television violence. Although societal norms reflect grave distaste for obscenity and hate speech, such values may be less cemented for TV violence (Lester, 1999). Other values, such as free and artistic expression, often take precedent over public health issues associated with violence on television (e.g., Rojas et al., 1996; Salwen, 1998; Salwen & Driscoll, 1997). As Hamilton (1998a) noted, economics also plays a major role in the continuance of violent television programming. Even though most Americans report there is too much violence on TV, advertisers and programmers make decisions demographically, not collectively. Since the heaviest viewers of TV violence are also the primary audiences sought by advertisers, the violent programming continues to be prevalent. Additionally, it must be noted that this study was limited to attitudes and behaviors of North Carolinians. Citizens in other regions of the United States or other parts of the world might demonstrate slightly different tendencies toward this issue.

Additional research on television violence and the third-person effect is needed to assess the behavior component of Davison's (1983) hypothesis. Most research that included behavioral analysis used censorship as the sole potential action. Research assessing other options, such as implementing media education to address the problem proactively, would provide valuable insight for mass communication researchers. Other than the behavioral and explored demographic facets, it is important also to consider personality-oriented characteristics or cognitive inclination that may pave a route for resolving the puzzle.

Ultimately, an across-the-board validity and power of third-person effect is called into question as a result of this investigation. Inconsistency in definitions of the effects of television violence and continued high viewership and advertising support of violent programs may influence perceptions regarding the effects of violence on the self and others. Although it is possible to predict influences on attitudes about television effects on self and others individually, a distinction between the two groups of effects – first-person effect and third-person effect – could not be made across the population.

Figure 1: Causal Model--"pulling the plug" on TV violence


age
income
-.190
impact on others
gender
.107
-.086
.350
-.204
.253
religiosity
concern
Pull the Plug
-.157
-.431
political attitude
-.158
-.160
.107
parent

n= 589 adjusted R^2 =.343

Table 1. Prediction model of television violence effect on self

	b	B	t	sig
Concern	.278	.266	5.262	<.001
Age	-.005	-.105	-2.086	.038
Constant	2.364			

df= 2 F=21.553 sig< .001
R square= .099 adjusted R square= .094

Table 2. Prediction model of television violence effect on others

	b	B	t	sig
Concern	.368	.350	7.233	<.001
Gender	.174	.107	2.211	.028
Constant	.902			

df= 2 F=36.099 sig< .001
R square= .155 adjusted R square= .151

Table 3. Prediction model of "Pull the Plug" on TV violence

	b	B	t	sig
concern	-.712	-.431	-9.311	<.001
affect others	-.321	-.204	-4.623	<.001
parent	.313	.107	2.456	.014
income	-.005	-.086	-2.068	.039
constant	4.149			

df= 4 F=52.495 sig< .001
R square= .350 adjusted R square= .343

Appendix A.

Survey Questions in the Carolina Poll
Fall 1998

1. Would you say that you are very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not very concerned about the amount of violence on television?
   a. Yes, very concerned
   b. Somewhat concerned
   c. No, not very concerned
   d. Don't know/no answer

2. When you see violence on television, would you say it influences you--or would you say that it doesn't influence you?
   a. Yes, it has an influence
   b. Sometimes it does influence me
   c. No, it doesn't have an influence
   d. Don't know/no answer

3. What about other adults—do you think other people are influenced by seeing violence on television, or are they not influenced?
   a. Yes, they are influenced
   b. Sometimes they are
   c. No, they are not influenced
   d. Don't know/no answer

4. During the past 7 days, how often would you say that you changed the channel or turned off the TV to avoid violent content—never, seldom, sometimes, or often?
   a. Never
   b. Seldom
   c. Sometimes
   d. Often
   e. Don't know/no answer

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The Third-Person Effect and the Hierarchy of Communication Effects: The Perceived Persuasive Power of Public Relations

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ABSTRACT

The Third-Person Effect and the Hierarchy of Communication Effects: The Perceived Persuasive Power of Public Relations

This study is the first to link the third-person effect with theories of hierarchical communication effects and to use the public relations domain to test the third-person effect. Results of a regional telephone survey (n=368) support the notion that people perceive others to be more strongly affected by public relations messages than themselves. While the perceived effects of public relations on *self* follow the traditional communication effects hierarchy (knowledge – opinions – behavior), the perceived effects of public relations on *others* follow an alternative sequence (opinions – knowledge – behavior). The findings also indicate that an individual's negative view of public relations can lead to an increased third-person effect regarding public relations' perceived influence on behavior.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most studied recent communication effects approaches is the third-person effect. Coined by Davison (1983), the third-person effect suggests that people perceive others to be more strongly affected by mass media messages than themselves and that this perception may lead to behavioral reactions.[1] Initially a modest suggestion, the third-person effect has since grown to be a widely acknowledged media effects theory (Davison, 1996).

The third-person effect has been linked to various related communication theories, such as Noelle-Neumann's theory of the spiral of silence (Gunther, 1998), cognitive adaption theory (Atwood, 1994), and Heider's attribution theory (Gunther, 1991). However, one interesting theoretical linkage that has not been explored yet is the relationship between the third-person effect and hierarchies of communication effects (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; McGuire, 1985; 1989). Although not supported by strong research results (Dozier & Ehling, 1992), theories that describe hierarchies of communication effects are still commonly used in various fields of mass communication.

This study is the first to theoretically link the third-person effect with theories of hierarchical communication effects. It employs public relations, a message type that has not yet been used in third-person effects research, to explore the public's perceptions regarding various types of communication effects. Public relations is a field in which many practitioners base their persuasive goals and strategies on hierarchies of communication effects (Wilson, 1995). But if and to what degree do the targets of public relations messages differentiate between various effect types? Persuasion knowledge theory suggests that an audience's actual or perceived knowledge of persuasion attempts can have an impact on the effectiveness of persuasion attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Thus, the answer to the question above can have important implications for the effectiveness of public relations. In addition, knowing how "influencable" by public relations messages people see themselves versus others is of interest to public relations practitioners who plan on strategically using third-person effects, an idea that Davison (1983) suggested.

THEORY

Third-person effect

According to Davison (1983), "individuals who are members of an audience that is exposed to a persuasive communication ... will expect the communication to have a greater effect on others than on themselves" (p. 3). The difference between perceived effects of communication on *self* and *others* (the third persons) can be based on an overestimation of effects on others, an underestimation of effects on self, or a combination of both.

This main **perceptual hypothesis** of the third-person effect has been consistently supported by studies in areas such as product commercials and public service announcements (Gunther & Thorson, 1992; Gunther & Mundy, 1993), TV violence, TV trials, negative political advertising (Salwen, Dupagne, & Paul, 1998; Cohen & Davis, 1991), and TV coverage of the Lebanon war (Perloff, 1989). Other studies that confirmed the perceptual hypothesis focused on Holocaust-denial advertisements (Price, Tewksbury, & Huang, 1998), defamatory messages (Gunther, 1991; Mason, 1995), and rap lyrics (Eveland &

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[1] Perloff (1993b) introduced the term "third-person perception" which was also endorsed by

McLeod, 1999). Recently, Peiser and Peter (1999) extended third-person effect research beyond the effects of media messages and showed that people also perceive others to use television in less desirable forms.

Beyond a general perceptual bias, Davison (1983) also suggested the existence of a second, **behavioral hypothesis** of the third-person effect. He argued that as a result of the perceived impact of a message (on others), individuals might take some action no matter if they are among the ostensible audience for this message or not. The main reason for such behavior is believed to be a paternalistic interest in protecting other people. However, only limited support has been found for the behavioral component of the third-person effect, mostly in the area of censorship endorsement (Gunther, 1995; Shah, Faber, & Youn, 1999).

Contingent conditions of the third-person effect. A message's perceived social desirability is an important contingent condition of the third-person effect. Various authors showed that the third-person effect can be found when people perceive messages as harmful or anti-social, but not when messages are perceived as beneficial or pro-social (Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Eveland & McLeod, 1999). In some studies, these differences led to a reverse third-person effect with self perceived to be more influenced than others when it comes to socially desirable messages.[2] Gunther and Thorson (1992) found a "reverse third-person effect for emotional ads but the classic third-person effect for neutral ads" (p. 591) and explained this result with social desirability processes. Cohen and Davis (1991) reported that a political ad attacking one's preferred

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Davison (1996). However, in this paper the original term is used.

[2] This phenomenon has been described as a "first-person effect" (see Atwood, 1994; Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice, & Rosenfeld, 1991).

candidate produces a third-person effect while an ad attacking a partisan candidate produces a reverse third-person effect.

The impact of message context was confirmed in a study that found the third-person effect to be stronger for messages presented as an advertisement than messages presented as a newspaper article (Gunther & Mundy, 1993). Other research shows that the same message produces a greater third-person effect when it is presented as a newspaper article than when it is presented orally by a speaker (Mason, 1995). In addition, evidence was found for the influence of source bias and perceived physical and social distance between self and others (Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988; Gunther, 1991).

Researchers also found support for a number of recipient-specific contingent factors such as self-perceived expertise (Driscoll & Salwen, 1997; Lasorsa, 1989), ego-involvement (Perloff, 1989), and perceived intellectual superiority (Peiser & Peter, 1999). Sociodemographic contingency factors include education, age (Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice, & Rosenfeld, 1991), orientations, and media use (Salwen, Dupagne, & Paul, 1998). Only mixed support has been found for the influence of media orientations, media use, political knowledge, and political orientations (Price, Huang, & Tewksbury, 1997).

Theoretical conceptualizations of the third-person effect. Various explanations exist as to why people perceive others to be more affected by media messages than themselves. Shah, Faber, and Youn (1999) differentiate between cognitive and affective explanations. They argue that cognitive conceptualizations are based on causal attribution models and link affective conceptualizations to self-serving biases, a social desirability phenomenon also known as biased optimism (Gunther, 1995; Gunther & Mundy, 1993).

The emergence of affective explanations for the third-person effect is related to the fact that tests of the third-person effect have usually used negative media messages. Thinking of oneself as being less affected by a negative, persuasive message than others appears to be a more desirable position compared to being more influenced than others, which could be seen as an admission of weakness and naive openness to manipulation.

Other theoretical linkages include Noelle-Neumann's theory of the spiral of silence (Davison, 1983; Gunther, 1998), social comparisons and cognitive adaption theory (Atwood, 1994), Heider's attribution theory (Gunther, 1991), and the concept of pluralistic ignorance (Gunther & Thorson, 1992; Eveland & McLeod, 1999).

Communication effects of public relations

Public relations can be described as a persuasive communication management technique that aims at strategically influencing target publics according to the interests of an organization.[3] Miller and Levine (1996) argue that "at a minimum a successful persuasive attempt generates some type of cognitive, affective, or behavioral modification in the target" (p. 261). This assumption is reflected in the public relations literature which generally differentiates between three main areas, in which public relations activities can have an impact on human beings: knowledge, predispositions (opinions and attitudes), and behaviors (Broom & Dozier, 1990; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994).[4]

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[3] Normative, positivist public relations theories define (excellent) public relations as a symmetrical two-way process which satisfies the interests of organizations and their publics and leads to stable relationships (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig (1995).

These three effect areas are often used to set outcome objectives in the strategic public relations planning process (Wilson, 1995; Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 1992). Hunt and Grunig (1994) list the following objectives in their "taxonomy of effects" (p. 18): communication, retention of message, acceptance of cognitions, formation or change of an attitude (agreement), and complementary behavior. Broom and Dozier (1990) expand the behavioral effects component and identify six impact criteria for public relations programs: number of people who learn message content, number of people who change opinions, number of people who change attitudes, number of people who behave in the desired fashion, number of people who repeat behavior, and social and cultural change.

What most of these planning strategies have in common, is that their ranking of public relations objectives follows traditional theories of hierarchies of communication effects (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; McGuire, 1985; 1989). According to these theories, knowledge leads to attitudes, which in turn lead to behavior (Pavlik, 1987). Grunig and Hunt (1984) use a domino model to illustrate public relations practitioners' assumptions about communication effects. The model shows a "message domino" falling onto a "knowledge domino," which in turn falls onto an "attitude domino" which falls onto a "behavior domino."

However, although the domino model dominates many public relations textbooks, scholars have found only limited support for it. Dozier and Ehling (1992) argue "the last 50 years of communication research indicates that the model is wrong" (p. 164). In fact, several alternative communication effects models have been developed which introduce contingent factors to account for contradictory research findings and different hierarchies (Belch & Belch, 1995; Perloff, 1993a, Petty & Priester, 1994).

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[4] It should be noted that this study focuses on general *communication effects* as they relate to public relations rather than on public relations *effectiveness* which can be assessed at various levels, ranging from individual practitioners to society (Hon, 1997).

Advertising scholar Ray (1973) used the variables "perceived product differentiation" and "product involvement" to differentiate between a standard learning hierarchy (knowledge – attitudes – behavior), a dissonance attribution hierarchy (behavior – attitudes – knowledge), and a low-involvement hierarchy (knowledge – behavior – attitudes).

Vaughn (1980; 1986) suggests that information, attitude, and behavior effects do not form a straight hierarchy, but rather an overlapping circular model which can lead to various combinations of effects. Heath and Bryant (1992) also argue against a linear model of persuasion processes and social influence. They point out that "people change their attitudes to conform their behavior, as well as change their behavior to conform to attitudes" (pp. 125-126).

Valente, Paredes, and Poppe (1999) suggest a framework that includes all six possible combinations of the three communication effects elements knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. Their research on contraception in Peru shows that practice can precede knowledge and attitudes, thus leading to the uninformed adoption of innovations and limited short-term behavioral change.

An extension of cognitive response theories, the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion uses the motivation to process a message (e.g., personal relevance) and the ability to process a message (e.g., distraction) as intervening variables (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Priester, 1994; Petty & Wegener, 1998). The model proposes two routes to persuasion which lead to different communication effects: "Attitudes changed via the central route tend to be based on active thought processes resulting in a well-integrated cognitive structure, but attitudes changed via the peripheral route are based on more passive acceptance or rejection of simple cues and have a less well-articulated foundation" (pp. 101-102). Finally, the situational theory of communication behavior developed by Grunig (1976; 1982; Grunig & Repper, 1992) suggests that the effects of public relations activities are contingent upon three factors: problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement.

Communication effect hierarchies and the third-person effect

Linking the third-person effect with general communication effects is theoretically fruitful because the audience's belief or disbelief in communication effects is a factor that has not received enough attention in analyses of persuasion effectiveness (Miller & Levine, 1996). Only recently have scholars begun to pay more attention to the influence of perceived effects on persuasion activities.

In the consumer research domain, Friestad and Wright (1994, 1995) have developed and tested a comprehensive persuasion knowledge model that tries to explain "how people's persuasion knowledge influences their responses to persuasion attempts" (1994, p. 1). They argue that "as consumers' knowledge keeps maturing, insightful marketers may find themselves limited to searching for increasingly novel ways to execute well-known tactics" (Friestad & Wright, 1994, p. 22).

Due to its practical use of theories of hierarchical communication effects, public relations is a well-suited topic to study the links between the third-person effect and hierarchical communication effects. In 1996, Davison (p. 116) asked provokingly: "To what extent do advertising and public relations agencies depend for their existence on inflated estimations of communication effects?" For obvious reasons, it is important for public relations practitioners to make their *corporate clients or internal constituencies* believe in the effectiveness of public relations activities.

But it is also helpful for the public relations practitioners to know about the *target publics' persuasion knowledge.* This information in connection with general attitudes towards public relations or the sponsoring organization might allow for the creation of more successful public relations campaigns. For example, if the perceived effects of public relations are huge and the target public views public relations in a positive light, a highly visible campaign appears reasonable. However, if the perceived effects of public relations are huge and the target public holds a negative attitude towards public relations, it might be more efficient to take a less visible low-key approach. Two aspects of persuasion knowledge in public relations are examined in this study — the perceived public relations effects on others versus self, and the differences between various types of public relations effects.

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1*: People will expect public relations to have a greater effect on others than on themselves.*

Hypothesis one is based on the main assumption of the third-person effect which has been confirmed by numerous studies. Research findings have consistently shown that people perceive media messages to have more impact on others than on themselves (Gunther & Thorson, 1992; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Gunther, 1991; Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988).

Hypothesis 2a: *People will expect the effect of public relations on others to be stronger in regard to knowledge than opinions.*

Hypothesis 2b: *People will expect the effect of public relations on others to be stronger in regard to opinions than behavior.*

Hypotheses 2a and 2b are based on traditional models of hierarchical communication effects as used in the public relations literature (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; McGuire, 1985; 1989; Broom & Dozier, 1990; Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 1992). Given the lack of previous research, it was assumed that people base their beliefs about public relations effects on the domino model. According to the domino model, people should believe public relations activities have a greater effect on other people's knowledge than on other people's opinions, and in turn a greater effect on other people's opinions than on other people's behavior.[5]

Hypothesis 3: *The less people regard public relations as an important function for society, the greater will the difference between the perceived impact of public relations on themselves and others be.*

This hypothesis is grounded in the differential impact model brought forth by Tyler and Cook (1984) and predicts that the rejection of public relations' contributions to society increases a third-person effect. Cohen and Davis (1991) successfully tested such a hypothesis using negative political advertising as a differentiating media message (support vs. dislike for a political candidate). Similarly, Gunther and Mundy (1993) found that perceived harmful messages lead to greater third-person effects than perceived beneficial message. In their study of the O.J. Simpson murder trial, Driscoll and Salwen (1997) showed that "message content and people's pre-existing beliefs about media messages … can influence third-person perception" (p. 551).

Based on these research results, it was assumed that people who think public relations has a negative influence on society are likely to regard public relations messages as harmful rather than beneficial. Following the differential impact hypothesis, people who think public relations has a negative influence on society should be less likely to admit that public relations affects them, thus increasing the difference between perceived public relations effects on self and others. On the other hand, people who don't think public relations has a negative influence on society should be more willing to admit effects of public relations on themselves, thus lowering the difference between perceived public relations effects on self and others.

METHOD

Data collection. A telephone survey of randomly sampled adult residents in a Northeastern county was conducted with a CD-ROM phone number directory (ProCD, 1998) serving as the sampling frame. To check for reliability, question wording, and other problems related to the survey instrument, a pretest (n = 34) was conducted. The actual data were collected during a two-week period from October 2, 1998, until October 15, 1998. To decrease telephone response biases, the Kish procedure was used to randomly

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[5] Effects on *others* was chosen as a measure over effects on *self* because stronger differences were expected.

select one member of each household as the survey respondent. The telephone survey resulted in 368 completed interviews, equaling a response rate of 36%.[6]

Measurement of variables. Most of the questions used in the survey instrument consisted of statements that were to be assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

H1. To assess the perceived effect of public relations, three sets of questions were used, one for each type of effect. Each set consisted of two Likert scale questions that were similar except for the first- or third-person identifications (see Appendix). Effect on knowledge was operationalized as "public relations can help me personally learn about issues" (self) and "people can learn about issues from public relations" (others). Effect on opinion was operationalized as "public relations can make me change my opinion on an issue" (self) and "public relations can make people change their opinions on an issue" (others). Finally, effect on behavior was operationalized as "public relations can make me do things I otherwise would not do" (self) and "public relations can make people do things they otherwise would not do" (others). The corresponding self and others questions were paired, and correlated t-tests were used to test hypothesis one.[7]

H2a. The respondents' were asked to identify their level of agreement or disagreement with the following two statements: "People can learn about issues from public relations" (knowledge) and "public relations can make people change their opinions on an issue" (opinion). A correlated t-test was used to test the hypothesis.

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[6] The new AAPOR standards for survey research were used (Standard definitions, 1998). The cooperation rate was 38%, refusal rate 59%, and contact rate 96%.

H2b. Similar to hypothesis 2a, the respondents' were asked to identify their level of agreement or disagreement with two statements: "Public relations can make people change their opinions on an issue" (opinion) and "public relations can make people do things they otherwise would not do" (behavior). Again, a correlated t-test was used to test the hypothesis.

H3. The independent variable — people's image of public relations — was measured through a Likert scale question that asked for the respondents' assessment of the statement that "public relations is an important profession that is needed in our society." To measure the dependent variable — the perceived effect difference between self and others — a perceived public relations impact differential was constructed. For each type of effect — knowledge, opinion, behavior — the absolute mathematical difference between the perceived impact on self and others was calculated based on a subtraction of the self-value from the others-value. This was done for all respondents as well as for a third-person subsample only. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to test the hypothesis.

RESULTS

Most of the respondents' sociodemographic characteristics, including gender, race, and ethnicity were comparable to county's 1990 census data and other 1996 statistical data. The term public relations seemed to be well-known. Of the 368 survey respondents, 349 (94.8%) had heard of the term public relations, and only 19 respondents (5.2%) had never heard of it (not reported in table form).

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[7] An additive index of all three perceived effects questions was neither reliable for the three

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Table 1 about here

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The frequencies reported in Table 1 show that the perceived effect of public relations on self follows the traditional hierarchical communication effects model. The perceived effect of public relations on self was strongest for knowledge, less strong for opinions, and comparatively weak for behavior. Regarding others, the perceived strength of public relations effects didn't follow the traditional communication effects hierarchy, but appeared in the order opinions, knowledge, behavior. In terms of public relations' image, people tended to disagree with the statement that public relations has a negative influence on society, indicating a generally positive and accepting view of public relations.

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Table 2 about here

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The results in Table 2 show that hypothesis one was supported for each type of perceived public relations effect. Correlated t-test revealed that the survey respondents perceived the effects of public relations to be significantly stronger on others than on themselves regarding knowledge ($t = 4.17$, $df = 344$, $p < .001$), opinions ($t = -8.55$, $df = 345$, $p < .001$), and behavior ($t = 14.49$, $df = 345$, $p < .001$). Note that the difference between perceived effects on others and self is greatest for behavior. This finding suggests that the differential impact of the third-person effect has its highest impact on the behavioral level.

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self questions (α=.56) nor for the three *others* questions (α=.39).

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Table 3 about here

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Hypotheses 2a and 2b stated that people would perceive effects of public relations on others according to the traditional hierarchy of communication effects: greater effects on knowledge than on opinions, and greater effects on opinions than on behavior. The results in Table 3 show that hypothesis 2a was not supported. There was no statistically significant difference between the perceived effect of public relations on others' knowledge and opinions (t = -1.40, df = 347, ns). However, hypothesis 2b was supported. A correlated t-test confirmed that the perceived effect of public relations on others' opinions is stronger than the perceived effect of public relations on others' behavior (t = -10.03, df = 346, p < .001). These results suggest that the perceived effects of public relations on others do not follow the traditional hierarchy of communication effects.

An additional correlated t-test showed that there is a statistically significant difference (t = 6.24, df = 346, p < .001) between the perceived effect of public relations on others' knowledge and behavior, the two extremes of the traditional hierarchy of communication effects.

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Table 4 about here

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A post-hoc analysis showed that the predictions of both H2a and H2b held true for the perceived effect of public relations on *self* (Table 4). The perceived effect of public relations on one's knowledge is greater than the perceived effect on one's opinion ($t = -3.59$, $df = 342$, $p < .001$), and the perceived effect on one's opinion is greater than the perceived effect on one's behavior ($t = 15.88$, $df = 345$, $p < .001$). Not surprisingly then, the perceived effect on one's knowledge is significantly greater than the perceived effect on one's behavior ($t = 17.95$, $df = 343$, $p < .001$).

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Table 5 about here

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Hypothesis three stated that a negative view of public relations would be positively correlated with the size of the third-person effect. The results displayed in Table 5 reveal that this hypothesis received mixed support. The type of communication effect turned out to be a differentiating factor. The respondents' view of public relations was neither significantly correlated with the perceived effect of public relations on knowledge ($r = -.06$, ns) nor with the perceived effect of public relations on opinions ($r = -.08$, ns). This was also the case, when only the respondents who had displayed a general knowledge or opinion related third-person effect were included in the analysis (third-person subsample).

Hypothesis three did, however, hold true for perceived effects on behavior. The more the survey respondents agreed with the statement that "public relations has a negative influence on society," the greater was the difference between the perceived effect of public relations on behavior of self and others ($r = -.14$, $p < .01$). This correlation became stronger when applied only to respondents who had displayed a behavior related third-person effect ($r = -.26$, $p < .01$). Thus, the findings of other researchers who examined the influence of a message's social desirability on the third-person effect (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Gunther & Mundy, 1993) were only partially replicated. People who think that public relations has a negative influence on society do not always perceive others to be more affected by public relations messages than themselves.

DISCUSSION

This study is the first to link the third-person effect with theories of hierarchical communication effects and to use the public relations domain to test the third-person effect. The results of a regional telephone survey support the notion that people perceive others to be more strongly affected by public relations messages than themselves. This finding holds true for various types of perceived effects: cognitive (knowledge), affective (opinions), and behavioral/conative (actions). However, the strongest third-person effect is found in connection with perceived behavioral effects.

An interesting result is the diverging hierarchy of communication effects when comparing the perceived effects of public relations on self and others. While the perceived effects on *self* follow the traditional communication effects hierarchy (knowledge – opinions – behavior), the perceived effects of public relations on *others* are presented in an alternative order. Behavioral change is still seen as the effect least likely to occur, but people think that others' opinions are easier to influence than others' knowledge. The finding that people attribute this non-traditional opinions – knowledge – behavior sequence only to others can be described as a "sociotropic response" (Gunther, 1995, p. 28) which probably reflects a social desirability effect.

The survey results also indicate that a person's positive or negative view of public relations can have an impact on the size of the third-person effect. However, this relationship is contingent upon the type of effect, and it is again the behavioral effect that stands out. The difference between the perceived effect of public relations on the behavior of self and others diminishes as a person's view of public relations turns more positive. Conceptually congruent with findings from other studies that compared beneficial and harmful messages (Gunther & Mundy, 1993), it appears that people are more willing to admit behavioral effects of public relations on themselves if they think public relations has a positive influence on society.

Limitations. The methodology used in this study limited the scope of the examination. Unlike in an experiment, a survey doesn't allow for control of the *actual impact* public relations has on individuals. Thus, the measurement was limited to perceived effects. As a result, it is impossible to determine the main source of the observed third-person effect: overestimation of effects on others, underestimation of effects on self, or a combination of both.

In addition, a more concise operationalization and better question wording for certain variables would have probably enhanced the validity of the concepts measured. Especially the theoretical differentiation between harmful and beneficial media messages deserves closer attention. It is possible that measuring respondents' positive or negative view of public relations might not capture the contingent condition described by Gunther and Mundy (1993) or Cohen and Davis (1991).

Future research. Future studies should use experiments to test the third-person effect based on the actual influence of public relations messages.

Experimental settings would also allow for inclusion of the third-person effect's behavioral hypothesis. In addition, public relations related independent variables such as message type, source characteristics, problem recognition and constraint, level of involvement, strategy used, and the public relations model employed could be controlled for.

Other research opportunities lie in public relations practitioners' awareness of and strategic use of the third-person effect. Davison (1983) hypothesized that "it is probable that advertisers and marketers are aware of the action-inducing potential of the third-person effect, although I have not noted references to this in the research literature" (p. 10). After 16 years, this statement still holds true.

The partially contradictory findings of this study regarding people's perceptions of the traditional hierarchy of communication effects invite a more detailed examination of this phenomenon. How and why do people differentiate between various (perceived) communication effects? In this context, it would be recommendable to make use of the contributions persuasion knowledge theory (Friestad & Wright, 1994) has to offer.

Finally, the establishment of theoretical linkages between the third-person effect, public opinion theories, and various models describing public relations' influence on the mass media might prove useful in explaining perceptions of public opinion. Gunther (1998) recently extended the third-person effect hypothesis and suggested a model of persuasive press inference. He proposes that "people infer public opinion from their perceptions of the content of media coverage and their assumptions of the persuasive impact of that coverage on others" (p. 486). Given the importance of media relations as a major public relations task, Gunther's model might prove fruitful for the examination of public relations' influence on public opinion.

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Table 1. Means and standard deviations for perceived effects of public relations on self and others, public relations' influence on society, and difference between perceived effect of public relations on self and others.

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
Public relations can help me personally learn about issues. *	3.55	.93	345
Public relations can make me change my opinion on an issue. *	3.31	1.04	348
Public relations can make me do things I otherwise would not do. *	2.38	.98	348
People can learn about issues from public relations. *	3.74	.81	349
Public relations can make people change their opinions on an issue. *	3.81	.64	348
Public relations can make people do things they otherwise would not do. *	3.32	.98	347
Public relations has a negative influence on society. **	3.26	.87	344

* Responses were coded: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree.

** Responses were coded: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree.

Table 2: Correlated t-tests for perceived effects of public relations variables.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	t value	df	sig.
People can learn about issues from public relations. *	3.73	.81	4.17	344	p < .001
Public relations can help me personally learn about issues. *	3.55	.93			
Public relations can make people change their opinions on an issue. *	3.81	.64	-8.55	345	p < .001
Public relations can make me change my opinion on an issue. *	3.31	1.04			
Public relations can make people do things they otherwise would not do. *	3.32	.98	14.49	345	p < .001
Public relations can make me do things I otherwise would not do. *	2.38	.99			

* Responses were coded: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree.

Table 3: Correlated t-tests for perceived effect of public relations on others variables.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	t value	df	sig.
People can learn about issues from public relations. *	3.74	.81			
Public relations can make people change their opinions on an issue. *	3.81	.64	-1.40	347	ns
Public relations can make people change their opinions on an issue. *	3.81	.64			
Public relations can make people do things they otherwise would not do. *	3.32	.98	-10.03	346	p < .001
People can learn about issues from public relations. *	3.74	.81			
Public relations can make people do things they otherwise would not do. *	3.32	.98	6.24	346	p < .001

* Responses were coded: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree.

Table 4: Correlated t-tests for perceived effect of public relations on self variables.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	t value	df	sig.
Public relations can help me personally learn about issues. *	3.55	.92	-3.59	342	p < .001
Public relations can make me change my opinion on an issue. *	3.32	1.04			
Public relations can make me change my opinion on an issue. *	3.30	1.04	15.88	345	p < .001
Public relations can make me do things I otherwise would not do. *	2.38	.98			
Public relations can help me personally learn about issues. *	3.55	.93	17.95	343	p < .001
Public relations can make me do things I otherwise would not do. *	2.38	.98			

* Responses were coded: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree.

Table 5: Pearson's correlation coefficient for difference between perceived impact on self and others and public relations' function in society variables.

Variables	Public relations has a negative influence on society. *
Difference between perceived effect of public relations on **knowledge** of self and others (all cases) **	-.06 (340)
Difference between perceived effect of PR on **knowledge** of self and others (only third-person effect cases) ***	-.10 (81)
Difference between perceived effect of public relations on **opinions** of self and others (all cases) **	-.08 (342)
Difference between perceived effect of PR on **opinions** of self and others (only third-person effect cases) ***	-.11 (125)
Difference between perceived effect of public relations on **behavior** of self and others (all cases) **	-.14 [a] (343)
Difference between perceived effect of PR on **behavior** of self and others (only third-person effect cases) ***	-.26 [a] (190)

* Responses were coded: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree.

** Calculated by subtracting the value of perceived effect on self from the value of perceived effect on others. The absolute value of the result was used, ranging from 0 (no difference between perceived effect on self and others) to 4 (high difference between perceived effect on self and others).

*** Calculated similar to the variable above, but limited to the cases that perceived the effect on others to be stronger than on themselves.

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[a] $p < .01$

APPENDIX: Survey questions

1. **Have you ever heard of the term public relations? (Filter question)**
    - Yes
    - No
    - Don't know
    - Refused

2. **Public relations can help me personally learn about issues.**
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

3. **Public relations can make me change my opinion on an issue.**
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

4. **Public relations can make me do things I otherwise would not do.**
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

5. **People can learn about issues from public relations.**
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

6. **Public relations can make people change their opinions on an issue.**
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

7. **Public relations can make people do things they otherwise would not do.**
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

8. **Public relations is an important profession that is needed in our society.**
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

Re-Thinking the Role of Information in Diffusion Theory: An Historical Analysis with an Empirical Test

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Abstract

Re-Thinking the Role of Information in Diffusion Theory: An Historical Analysis with an Empirical Test

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The major premise of this paper is that the commonly-accepted generalization -- that mass media are most effective in bringing about awareness, and interpersonal media are best at persuasion -- was shaped and to some extent distorted by a preoccupation with the rediscovery of the group, along with a research emphasis on finding the most influential communication channels rather than exploring how the overall patterns of information source use might affect the process.

Re-thinking the Role of Information in Diffusion Theory: An Historical Analysis with an Empirical Test

The 1930-1960 period, during which much of communication theory began to develop, was a time of "rediscovery" of the group – the idea that the group serves as the interface between the individual and society. In the case of diffusion theory, this rediscovery engendered a "dominant paradigm" focusing on group processes, interpersonal communication, and influence – informed by a spurt in empirical research and several new conceptual leaps – that shaped and was itself influenced by researchers whose funding base and interests were practical and applied. Diffusion generalizations spawned in the 1950s have guided not only 4,000 subsequent empirical studies, but have also had a profound effect on the activities of communication strategists.

One of the key generalizations that emerged is that different channels of communication play key roles at different points in the adoption process. Mass media play their key role in bringing about initial awareness and knowledge of new ideas and practices, while interpersonal sources are relied upon when deciding whether or not to adopt. The idea of these discrete functions for communication channels has found its way into the mainstream literature on how to use communication effectively to bring about social change. In a review, Chaffee (1979) noted that this discrete function idea constitutes one of the most enduring generalizations derived from research on human communication.

In hindsight, however, while it is clear how researchers were led to the conclusions they drew at the time, examination of the origins of the generalizations suggests that this generalization, and especially its practical interpretation, does not now, and to some extent never did match the actual diffusion process. The major premise of this paper is that the generalizations concerning the role of information in the diffusion process were shaped and to some extent distorted by a preoccupation with the rediscovery of the group, and a research emphasis on finding the most influential communication channels rather than exploring how the overall patterns of information source use might affect the process. This was combined with a methodological approach that was inadequate to measure the synergistic contributions of multiple information sources to the diffusion process. This paper has three main purposes:

1. Explore the basis of the original generalizations in the context of the time in which they developed, and demonstrate how conceptual preoccupations and methodologies led to conclusions that failed to adequately explain the role of communication;
2. Offer four propositions that could form the basis for revised generalizations concerning the role of information in the diffusion process;
3. Provide a preliminary empirical test of the propositions, using a longitudinal dataset of the adoption of computers over a 15-year period.

Diffusion Theory

Diffusion theory is one of the most commonly-used theories in the social sciences, education, health and marketing, and is standard fare in most communication theory or communication strategy and planning courses. While interest in this theoretical area peaked in the late 1950s and 1960s and then declined, it has had a resurgence of sorts due to the current great interest in new communication technologies and how they might affect society.

"Diffusion" is concerned with the spread of ideas from originating sources to ultimate users. Research concerns have focused on the speed at which an innovation spreads and the factors that facilitate or inhibit this spread. Perhaps the most significant finding is that a significant time lag exists between the introduction of an innovation into a social system and its acceptance by most members of that social system. The time required varies from system to system and among innovations in the same system, but usually a period of years or decades is required for fairly complete diffusion. An S-shaped diffusion curve has been found for the majority of innovations studied.

What has been termed the "classic" diffusion model was developed by a small group of rural sociologists in the early 1950s who became part of a North Central states subcommittee that synthesized and published the results. In 1954, the original draft was integrated by George M. Beal and Joe M. Bohlen of Iowa

State University as a flannel board presentation entitled "The Diffusion Process" (North Central Regional Publication No. 1, 1962).

The classic diffusion model included five stages of the adoption process – awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption – and suggested that there were discrete functions for different information channels at different stages. Everett Rogers later re-named the stages, and added a "confirmation" stage following adoption in 1971 (Rogers with Shoemaker, 1971) and a "re-invention" stage between adoption and confirmation in his 1983 and 1995 books (Rogers, 1983, 1995).

The classic 1954 diffusion model also included the idea that individual differences cause people to adopt innovations at different time periods and utilize varying amounts and sources of information. Five categories of adopters were conceptualized: innovators (first 2.5%), early adopters (next 13.5%), early majority (next 34%), late majority (next 34%) and late adopters or laggards (last 16%).

The 1954 Bohlen and Beal flannel board presentation also noted that there were different types of innovations, and that their characteristics affect the adoption process. It distinguished between changes in materials and equipment, changes in improved practices, and an "innovation" requiring new use patterns. Later, these characteristics were re-worked to include Linton's (1936) approach including "compatibility" of the innovation (see Lionberger, 1952, p. 140). By the time North Central Regional Extension Publication No. 13 was issued in October, 1961, factors included compatibility, divisibility, complexity, and visibility (North Central Regional Extension Publication No. 13, 1961). By 1962, "relative advantage" had been added to the list (Subcommittee for the Study of Diffusion of Farm Practices, 1962).

Origins of Generalizations about the Role of Information in Diffusion

The generalizations concerning the role of information in the diffusion process arose from a focus by rural sociologists on a practical problem: how to encourage farmers to adopt new agricultural technologies such as antibiotics, fertilizers, herbicides and other improved practices. Beginning in the early 1940s, Bryce Ryan and Neal Gross (1943, 1950) had conducted what would become the seminal study of how Iowa farmers adopted hybrid seed corn. Setting the stage for what would come later, they took a structural functionalist approach that borrowed from earlier sociological diffusion research (Chapin, 1928; Bowers, 1938), but moved analysis from an aggregated to an individual level. They believed that social factors, and not just the economists' "invisible hand" played a key role in social change. As society modernized, they reasoned that different individuals would be affected at different points in time, and that this would be reflected in differential adoption rates of new practices. In their study, they set forth: (1) the "S" shape of the rate of adoption of an innovation over time; (2) the characteristics of the various adoption categories; and (3) the relative importance of different communication channels at various stages in the innovation decision process. Ryan designed the study to examine "social factors in economic decisions" (Rogers, 1995). Results showed that farmers tended to name salesmen (who were often other farmers) as their first source of information about hybrid seed corn, and friends or neighbors as the channel used when they made their decision to adopt. Ryan and Gross concluded that interpersonal channels were very important in the diffusion process.

Herbert Lionberger (1952, 1960) also took a functionalist approach, building on Linton's (1936) idea that cultural differences between regions affect adoption. His research (1951: 28) focused attention on the use of both mass media and personal sources of information by both low resource and high resource farmers. By 1951, Lionberger had concluded that "personal sources" (friends, agricultural agents) are more convincing than "impersonal" ones (reading, radio). He reached this conclusion because the use of personal sources (experts and neighbors) correlated more highly with use of an index of technological practices than did impersonal sources (newspapers, magazines, radio).

Eugene Wilkening took a psychological approach, suggesting that different individual perceptions of an innovation lead to different uses of information sources. His research (1953) began to link the use of information sources to stages of the adoption process. In a study of Wisconsin dairy farmers, Wilkening explored Ryan and Gross's idea that the sources of information farmers used for "initial" knowledge might be different than "those they use for understanding how it can be made more effective after it is adopted" (Wilkening, 1956: 361). He divided information-seeking into three categories: (1) awareness: hearing about the change; (2) decision-making: information that helps decide whether or not to try it out; (3) action: instructions on how to put the change into effect. Although Ryan and Gross had found that salesmen were the first source of information about hybrid seed corn, Wilkening hypothesized that mass media, including magazines, newspapers and radio programs, would be the most frequently mentioned first source. Building on the work of Lionberger and his own studies in North Carolina, he noted that both low-income and high-income farmers tended to use mass media sources. Therefore, he predicted that these sources would be used to create awareness. It should be noted that an important difference between Wilkening's approach and Ryan and Gross was that Wilkening did not ask about any particular innovation. Instead, he asked where farmers got information about "new ideas in farming." This tends to produce important differences in responses. For example, contemporary studies asking general audiences where they get their "news" tends to lead to a response of television, while asking about some particular news event yields responses such as newspapers, magazines, friends, etc. Wilkening's results were in accord with his expectations. Mass media were often named as an initial source (63% of cases), while "other farmers" were mentioned as the source that helped them decide (47% of cases, compared to only 4% for mass media).

A. Lee Coleman and C. Paul Marsh (1955) were concerned with communication aspects of the diffusion process. They were interested in understanding differences between communities (high adoption, low adoption), groups, and individuals so they could tailor communication messages for maximum effectiveness.

In 1951, a subcommittee representing rural sociologists from North Central states working on farm diffusion was created with Eugene Wilkening from the University of Wisconsin as co-chair along with Neal Gross from Iowa State University. Other members were Lee Coleman, Kentucky; Charles Hoffer, Michigan State; and Harold Pedersen, South Dakota. Herbert Lionberger was added by 1952 (Lionberger, 1952: 141). By 1954, the subcommittee added Joe Bohlen, Iowa State, as chair, replacing Gross, Paul Miller, Michigan State replacing Hoffer, and Robert Dimit, South Dakota State. Harold Pedersen also left the committee (Subcommittee for the Study of Diffusion of Farm Practices, 1955). Bohlen and an Iowa State colleague, George Beal, played a key role in the development of the generalizations linking information seeking to stages of the adoption process.

Bohlen and Beal accepted the structural functionalist approach of Ryan and Gross. One of their major contributions was to add a conceptual basis for the stages of the adoption process. The work of Mead (1950) and Dewey (1910) was used to suggest that there are general stages of inquiry people go through when solving problems. Bohlen and Beal adapted these stages specifically for innovations. They also were concerned with peer influence, small group dynamics, and social psychology. Their research on community action and community leadership also influenced them to focus on how interpersonal influence brings about change.

It is important to note that although they were presented as "generalizations," and built on the previous work by Lionberger, Wilkening and Ryan and Gross, Bohlen and Beal's stage-based generalizations had not yet been subjected to empirical test across the five stages of the adoption process developed by the subcommittee. Bohlen and Beal first presented the generalizations as part of a flannel board presentation to Iowa State University Extension in 1954. In 1955, they presented them to the National Project on Agricultural Communications at Michigan State University. In 1958, a major presentation to leading corporate marketing executives took place. Over the next few years, they would repeat their presentation to more than 800 audiences of groups often numbering 400 or more (Chang, 1998:23; Rogers, 1975: 11).

The generalizations were first published in 1955 as North Central Regional Publication No. 1 (Subcommittee for the Study of Diffusion of Farm Practices, 1955). The report credited members of the subcommittee as accepting full responsibility for the report. In its first four years, more than 80,000 copies of the report were sold (North Central Regional Extension Publication No. 13, 1961), a phenomenal success for a research publication. A shortened version produced by Iowa State University Extension distributed even more copies. The

Subcommittee also published a bibliography of 110 relevant research publications (North Central Rural Sociology Committee, 1959). Rogers (1975) noted that the members of this subcommittee constituted an "invisible college" that played an important role in shaping both the theoretical paradigm and methodological approaches used in diffusion studies.

For several reasons, relatively few of the thousands of diffusion studies dealt with generalizations about information-seeking. Most diffusion studies did not focus on information seeking at all. Instead, they were concerned with patterns of adoption, socio-economic characteristics (age, education, social status, farm size) and innovation-specific factors. Rogers with Shoemaker (1971) provide an appendix classifying diffusion studies by the generalizations they tested.

Generalizations concerning the role of information in the diffusion process developed by the rural sociologists were of two basic types. First were generalizations having to do with the overall use of information sources. In 1961, Bohlen and the other members of the subcommittee argued that "the typical innovator not only receives more different types of information about new practices, but also is likely to receive information sooner and from more technically accurate sources" (North Central Regional Extension Publication No. 13, 1961: 8). Rogers (1962) formalized the generalization: "Earlier adopters utilize a greater number of different information sources than do later adopters" (p. 313). This generalization had been supported by a number of earlier studies.

The second type of generalizations were new, and grew out of the flannel board presentation of Bohlen and Beal. They take a discrete function approach to information source use. Two key generalizations - one dealing with the role of mass media at different stages of the adoption process, and the other with interpersonal communication with friends and neighbors - emerged from the first published work of the Subcommittee. The generalizations suggested that information channels have discrete functions. According to the Subcommittee for the study of Diffusion of Farm Practices (1955):

> "It is at the awareness stage that the mass media devices have their greatest impact. The evidence is that for the majority, mass media become less important as sources of information after the individual has become aware of the ideas (p. 4)." Later, it observes: (p. 5): "the data available indicate that as people are evaluating an idea for their own use, they usually consult with neighbors and friends whose opinions they respect …. The reasons for the apparent lack of importance of mass media and salesmen at this and later stages of the adoption process are: (a) the information they provided through these channels is too general; (b) the potential adopters mistrust some mass media information because they feel that the information is tempered by the business interests of those who are in control of them."

The Elaboration and Testing of the Generalizations

The importance and relative newness of the discrete function generalizations can be seen by examining the overall pattern of diffusion studies up until that time. Table 1 divides key diffusion studies along two dimensions. On the left-hand side are studies that examine the first type of generalization -- *general* information-seeking both for general topics (Quadrant 1) and for specific innovations (Quadrant 2). Such studies considered both mass media and interpersonal channels to be important, but did not consider the possibility that the use of channels might change as an individual moved from one adoption stage to another. Studies on the right-hand side of the figure focus on the discrete function, explicitly considering information seeking by *stage* of the adoption process. Those in Quadrant 3 are for innovations in general, while those in Quadrant 4 are for specific innovations. The studies are arranged in each quadrant by date. Note that when the two generalizations were put forward in 1954, only Ryan and Gross's original 1943 corn hybrid seed study was found in Quadrant 4, and the only other study examining information-seeking by stages was Wilkening's 1953 study in Quadrant 3.

Table 1: Subcommittee Rural Diffusion Studies Sorted by General versus Specific Innovations And Information-Seeking in General or by Stages

Quadrant 1 **Diffusion studies of general information-seeking for general innovations** USDA Vermont Study (1947) Lionberger (1951) Coleman and Marsh (1955) Lionberger (1955; 1957); Lionberger and Coughenour, 1957) Dickerson (1955) Fliegel (1956) van den Ban (1957) Lionberger and Campbell (1971) Yancey (1982)	**Quadrant 3** **Diffusion studies examining information-seeking by adoption stages For general innovations** Wilkening (1953; 1956), 636 Wisconsin farmers Lionberger and Chang (1981) 396 Taiwan Farmers
Quadrant 2 **Diffusion studies examining general Information seeking for specific innovations** Wilson and Trotter (1933) Bowers (1938) Wilkening (1950; 1952) Abell (1951) Marsh and Coleman (1954) Dimit (1954) Lionberger (1955) Campbell (1959) Rogers and Burdge (1962) Lee (1967)	**Quadrant 4** **Diffusion studies examining information-seeking by adoption stages For specific innovations** Ryan and Gross (1943, 1950) Beal and Rogers (1957); Rogers and Beal (1958) Coleman, Katz, and Menzel (1957; 1959; 1966) Copp, Sill and Brown (1958); Sill (1958) Beal and Rogers (1960) Rogers and Pitzer (1960) Rogers and Burdge (1961) Rahim (1961) Deutschmann and Fals-Borda (1962) Mason (1962, 1963) Rogers and Leuthold (1962) Lionberger (1963) Rogers (1964); Rogers and Meynen (1965) Mason (1964) Singh and Jha (1965); Jha and Singh (1966) Jain (1965) Sawhney (1967) Rogers with Svenning (1969)

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In the first two studies designed to test the generalizations, Rogers and Beal (1958) argued logically that they should be supported:

> "Most new farming practices are developed through research. The impersonal mass media devices of newspapers, farm papers and magazines, radio, television, and commercial publications all attempt to rapidly communicate these research findings to the farmers. Thus it would seem reasonable that the majority of farmers, especially the early adopters, would become aware of new farming practices through the impersonal mass media sources.
>
> However, an understanding of the social relations of most farmers and the mental processes involved at the information and application stages would suggest that personal sources may play the more important role at the information and application stages." (Rogers and Beal, 1958: 330)

Researchers at Columbia University

The 1954-1957 time period was one of significant conceptual creativity, research and dissemination for the rural sociologists. However, that same time period was also of great importance for another group of researchers who shared the rural sociologists' concerns about the practical effects of mass media and interpersonal communication channels. Because this other group was using the same general paradigm emphasizing the importance of influence and groups in the communication process, it is important to examine the origins of their work, as well as how the two groups eventually merged. Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard

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Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet published *The People's Choice* in 1948, a book concerning the role of mass media and interpersonal channels in the 1940 presidential election. The book was widely heralded as indicating the importance of interpersonal communication channels and "opinion leaders" in influencing voters. By 1955, when Bohlen's subcommittee was first publishing its generalizations, Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld were publishing *Personal Influence,* which contained an extensive review of research on the use of mass communication and interpersonal channels to influence audiences. The book emphasized the "re-discovery" of the importance of social groups in communication and persuasion, and represented a declaration of victory over mass communication theorists who had viewed audiences as "atomistic" individuals who could be directly persuaded by mass media. The book launched the "two-step flow" theory of communication which postulated that mass media influence traveled through opinion leaders who interpreted their content to audiences that used the information to decide how to vote. In a conclusion very similar to that of the rural sociologists, they found that interpersonal sources are the key to persuading individuals to change. That is, information channels have discrete functions in changing human behavior. Katz and Lazarsfeld based their work on a number of small group research studies including the industrial (Hawthorne studies from 1924 through the 1930s emphasizing social relations as a key factor in industrial output - (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1941)), military (The American Soldier studies showing the willingness of U.S. troops to fight in

World War II was dependent upon informal group processes – (Stouffer, 1949; Shil, 1950)), and urban (The Yankee City studies showing the key role social cliques play in placing groups socially – (Warner and Lunt, 1941)) studies that re-emphasized the importance of groups in the persuasion and communication process.

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955:3) concluded:

> "The 'rediscovery' of the primary group is an accepted term now, referring to the belated recognition that researchers in many fields have given to the importance of informal, interpersonal relations within situations formerly conceptualized as strictly formal and atomistic. It is 'rediscovery' in the sense that the primary group was dealt with so explicitly (though descriptively and apart from any institutional context) in the work of pioneering American sociologists and social psychologists and then was systematically overlooked by empirical social research until its several dramatic 'rediscoveries'" (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955: 3).

Remarkably, in 1955, despite the fact that their research concerned very similar theory and research interests, neither of these two groups had noted or cited each other. (An article by Coleman and Marsh, 1955, had cited Lazarsfeld and Berelson, but only as an example of communication research. The similarities to the work of rural sociologists were not noted). Thus, the initial generalizations made by both groups were developed independently. Although the two groups discovered each other a year later, the generalizations that had developed in each area were not changed immediately in any substantial way. Rather, the discovery of each other led mainly to the citing of each other's work as an indicator of the importance of their overall topical area.

Common themes in both areas included:

1. A focus on influence - how media and interpersonal sources lead to changes in adoption and voting behavior;
2. A concern with both mass media and interpersonal channels, with a primary role for influence placed with interpersonal channels and social groups;
3. A focus in the original research on practical recommendations that could be derived from the research, rather than on building rigorous theory;
4. An approach examining communication behavior and decision-making over extended time periods.

The emphasis of the Columbia group on practical outcomes and interpersonal communication is evident in the introduction Katz and Lazarsfeld wrote in their 1955 book:

> "Our purpose, of course, is to try to point the way for the planning of research on the transmission of mass persuasion via the mass media - and particularly, for the incorporation of a concern with interpersonal relations into the design of such research. By attempting to specify exactly which elements of person-to-person interaction might be relevant for mass media effectiveness, and by exploring what social science knows about the workings

> of these elements, we shall contribute, perhaps, to a more complex - yet more realistic - formulation of a "model" for the study of mass persuasion campaigns" (p. 44).

Everett Rogers, who in 1954 became a graduate student of George Beal at Iowa State, wrote in 1975 (Rogers, 1975) that he "stumbled across" an educational diffusion study by Paul Mort, Columbia University, while leafing through a journal in the waiting room of a professor's office. He also found a medical diffusion study conducted by Coleman, Katz and Menzel. In 1956, he got a small grant to attend a conference in New York that was also attended by Columbia researchers James Coleman, Elihu Katz and Herbert Menzel. As a result of the meeting, Rogers said he "became convinced that a general diffusion process occurred for many types of innovations" (p. 12).

While Rogers' attendance at the New York conference solidified his own thinking, researchers from both groups had already begun to notice one another. Menzel and Katz (1955-56) cited Wilkening, Lionberger and Marsh and Coleman - all key farm diffusion studies - as being relevant. In 1956 Wilkening (1956) also cited a number of Columbia studies in the same way.

The mutual discovery led to new material in the literature of both areas, and a 1960 article by Katz weaving together the strands of research from rural sociology, small group research, education, medical sociology, industry and other areas. Although the Beal and Rogers diffusion article in 1957 (Beal and Rogers, 1957) makes no mention of Katz or the Columbia researchers, by 1958

(Rogers and Beal, 1958) they were mentioned. A 1958 synthesis of work presented to corporate marketers discusses contributions of both the rural sociologists and the Columbia researchers (Foundation for Research on Human Behavior, 1959). By 1959, the rural sociologists began including Katz and Lazarsfeld's work in their bibliographies. Table 2 shows the cross-citations of the two schools of research. Although we have examined much of the published diffusion literature, the gap between actual conceptual or field work and publication makes it difficult in some cases to know exactly when some of the integration occurred.

In 1960, in separate works, both Lionberger and Katz sought to link the generalizations that had been developed by the two groups of researchers. Katz, specifically with respect to the generalizations about the role of information in the process of making either political or agricultural decisions, noted that a "convergence has already revealed a list of parallel findings which strengthen theory in both [areas]. . . In both urban and rural settings personal influence appears to be more effective in gaining acceptance for change than are the mass media or other types of influence" (Katz, 1960, p. 439). The work of Lionberger and Wilkening is cited alongside Katz and Lazarsfeld. From that time on, studies from both areas of research have routinely cited one another. Many of the Columbia studies are now listed in diffusion bibliographies (see Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971; Rogers, 1983; 1995).

Table 1: Chronological Comparisons of Cross-Citations Between Rural Sociologist Subcommittee and Columbia University Researchers

Key Research: Subcommittee on Farmer Adoption: Citations of Columbia researchers	**Key Research: Bureau of Applied Research, Columbia University: Citations of Subcommittee Research**
1943: Ryan and Gross seminal study of the diffusion of hybrid seed corn	1948: Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet: *The People's Choice;* no mention of rural farm research
1962: Gross expansion of the 1943 study to 10 innovations makes no mention of Columbia researchers. 1952: Lionberger review of literature; no mention of Columbia research; 1952: Wilkening North Carolina Bulletin 98 study; no mention of Columbia empirical studies	
1954: Bohlen and Beal give their first flannel board presentation including the new discrete generalizations	
1955 (November): Subcommittee publishes generalizations and initial bibliography; no mention of Columbia work 1955: Coleman and Marsh cite Lazarsfeld and Berelson, but only as examples of recent communication research. They made no parallels with the work of rural sociologists.	1955: Katz and Lazarsfeld publish *Personal Influence;* no mention of rural farm research or Subcommittee
1956: Wilkening Social Forces journal article cites 1948 People's Choice book; 1956: Everett Rogers attends conference in New York and meets Columbia group.	1955-56: Menzel and Katz drug diffusion article explicitly cites Wilkening, Lionberger and Marsh and Coleman studies, and concludes that "these studies are excellent representatives of a research tradition of the greatest importance for students of communication."
1957: Beal and Rogers (1957) article testing generalizations; no mention of Columbia group	1957: Katz explicitly cites Ryan and Gross, and Marsh and Coleman in this 2-step flow article 1957: Coleman, Katz and Menzel (1957) medical diffusion study: no mention of rural sociology studies, but this study focuses on group influences on doctors
1958: Rogers and Beal (1958) article testing generalizations cites both the Columbia 1948 and 1955 books in support of importance of social groups 1958: Foundation for Research on Human Behavior includes a synthesis of research from both the rural sociologists and Columbia researchers.	
1959: 2nd Edition of Subcommittee Bibliography cites 1955 *Personal Influence* book and Kurt Lewin	
1960: Lionberger book on diffusion has citations of 1948, 1955, and Coleman, Katz and Menzel medical study; plus other studies that form the base for the Columbia research; he integrates Columbia studies in discussions of influence and social status. 1960: Beal and Rogers Ag Experiment Station Report No. 26 mentions 1948 book	1960: Katz publishes review of literature explicitly including farm diffusion studies as part of "rediscovery" of importance of social groups, and attempts to integrate generalizations from the two areas.
1962: Rogers first book explicitly integrates Columbia University work into diffusion studies	1961: Katz compares Ryan and Gross hybrid seed corn study with the Coleman, Katz and Menzel medical study and uses both to develop joint generalizations

In his 1979 review, Chaffee (1979: 1) recognized how powerful and long-lasting the generalizations had become in the field of human communication.

> "One of the most durable policy generalizations derived from research on human communication is that interpersonal influence is more efficacious than mass communication in bringing about social change. Campaigns, corporations, and even countries are advised that mass media, while perhaps necessary to achieve economies of scale, are inferior to real, personal contact as a means of persuading people to change their behavior. Of course, no one sophisticated in the research literature would make such a sweeping statement unhedged by limitations, exceptions and caveats. But in transliteration from academic reviews to the more streamlined advice that circulates in communication planning circles, the image of powerful interpersonal processes comes through with unmistakable clarity."

What becomes clear is that the newly-designed generalizations were guided by the paradigm of the importance of personal communication with a focus on influence. Chaffee, in his 1979 critique of the generalizations, argued that both diffusion and the two-step flow researchers were led to conclusions that supported their interpersonal paradigm. Chaffee found that although the

1940 Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) study was considered a classic reinforcing the importance of interpersonal communication, in fact:

> "the original data… reveal that the media - even in that pre-television era - were judged more powerful by most voters. A slight majority cited either radio (38%) or newspapers (23%) as the most important single source in making their voting decisions… About one-half of those who changed their voting intentions during the campaign cited something learned from either the newspaper or radio as the main source of change. On the other hand, less than half mentioned any personal contact as an influential source, and less than one-fourth considered an interpersonal source as the most important one" (Chaffee, 1979, p. 8; Chaffee, 1982, p. 66). Chaffee's conclusion: "Apparently the emphasis on interpersonal influence emanating from the Erie County study was due more to the contrast between these figures and the researchers' expectations for far more dramatic evidence of media impact" (p. 9).

(While Chaffee's conclusion here about expectations is probably correct, it should be noted that media use was assessed for every respondent, while interpersonal source use was volunteered by respondents. This would tend to understate interpersonal mentions).

Similarly, for both diffusion and two-step flow theorists, Chaffee criticized an approach that sought to find the "most influential" communication channel.

> "Just as frequency of use is not a valid criterion for inferring higher credibility or preference for a channel, neither is recalled influence a valid criterion for concluding that one channel is capable of achieving stronger effects than another. … wise utilizers of information rarely rely on mass media alone; they do well to check with experts, compare notes with peers, and otherwise attempt to validate media content for themselves before acting upon it" (Chaffee, 1979, p.9).

Studies Supporting the Discrete Function Generalizations about the Role of Information Across Stages.

The discrete function generalizations developed by Bohlen and Beal were conceptually new, and at the time they found their way onto the flannel board and into the first Subcommittee report, they had not been empirically tested. The first two studies designed to test them were conducted by Beal, Bohlen and Rogers in 1956 using 148 farm husbands and wives in central Iowa (Rogers and Beal, 1958; Beal and Rogers, 1960; Beal and Rogers, 1957). Both studies found that mass media were the source of awareness for new fabrics, 2-4D herbicide spray, and animal antibiotics, while friends and neighbors were most frequently mentioned as the source of information at the "acceptance" or "persuasion" stage of the process. It was also noted that mass media and "cosmopolite" (expert, non-local) sources played a more important role for innovators and early adopters than for those who adopted later.

By 1960, Lionberger (1960) counted two additional supportive studies (Copp, Sill and Brown, 1958; and Lionberger, 1958). In 1971, when the most exhaustive list of studies to date was assembled by Rogers with Shoemaker (1971), a total of 21 studies were cited in support of these generalizations. However, when duplication is removed (several studies report results of the same piece of research), only 14 empirical studies remain. Two additional studies were found by Rogers with Shoemaker not to support the generalizations.

In support of one of the most extreme implications of the discrete function role of information sources, Rogers (1995) cites a key study by Sill (1958; Copp, Sill and Brown, 1958) of dairy farmers in western Pennsylvania. In that study, the conclusion was that "if the probability of adoption were to be maximized, communication channels must be used in an ideal time sequence, progressing from mass media to interpersonal channels (Sill, 1958). Copp, Sill and Brown (1958: 70) found "a temporal sequence is involved in agricultural communication in that messages are sent out through mass media directed to awareness, then to groups, and finally to individuals. A farmer upsetting this sequence in any way prejudices progress at some point in the adoption process." They concluded: "The greatest thrust out from the knowledge stage was provided by the use of the mass media, while interpersonal channels were salient in moving individuals out of the persuasion stage. Using a communication channel that was inappropriate to a given stage in the innovation-decision process (such as an interpersonal channel at the knowledge stage) was associated with later adoption of the new idea by an individual because such a channel use delayed progress through the process." (It should be noted here that Copp, Sill and Brown (1958) classified "printed extension" information as a mass medium, while Sill (1958) in his Ph.D. thesis using the same dataset classified "printed extension" as a "Technician," not a mass medium. The difference is important since this was a frequently-mentioned source. Since the use of sources such as either printed extension materials or oral extension agents was highly associated with later adoption, this is an important difference.) This example also demonstrates the interest of researchers in converting their findings into specific recommendations for practitioners.

Rogers with Shoemaker conducted a comparative analysis of the role played by mass media and cosmopolite-interpersonal channels by stages in the innovation-decision process for 23 different innovations (mostly agricultural) in the United States, Canada, India, Bangladesh, and Colombia. They concluded:

> "Mass media channels are of relatively greater importance at the knowledge stage in both developing and developed countries, although there was a higher *level* of mass media channel usage in the developed nations, as we would expect. Mass media channels were used by 52 percent of the respondents in developed nations at the persuasion stage, and 18 percent at the decision stage. The comparable figures for respondents in Third World nations were 29 percent and 6 percent. This

> meta-research showed that cosmopolite-interpersonal channels were especially important at the knowledge stage in developing nations" (Rogers, 1995: 196).

Studies Supporting Alternatives to the Discrete Function Approach

There was evidence in the empirical studies suggesting that there might be alternatives to the discrete function generalizations involving multiple media use, and some studies – including the seminal Ryan and Gross study – did not support the discrete function generalizations. It should be emphasized that the generalizations put forward by the Subcommittee did come with some caveats concerning their application:

> "Some studies, such as that of hybrid seed corn, indicate that salesmen are important in creating awareness of new ideas which involve the use of commercial products. Neighbors and friends are important creators of awareness of new ideas among the lower socio-economic groups" (Subcommittee for the Study of Diffusion of Farm Practices, 1955: 4).

One source of ideas for an alternative approach to discrete functions came from studies concerning the first type of generalizations – those predicting higher use of information sources of all types by earlier adopters. Those studies found a significant relationship between high information seeking from many different sources and adoption of specific innovations (Abell, 1951; Bowers, 1938; Dimit, 1954; Lionberger, 1955; Marsh and Coleman, 1954; USDA Vermont Study, 1947; Wilkening, 1950; Wilson and Trotter, 1933). Other studies found high levels of general information seeking about general agricultural topics rather than specific innovations also were associated with high levels of adoption (Coleman and Marsh, 1955; Dickerson, 1955; Lionberger, 1951). The high reported use of all information sources suggested that multiple sources might be operating at later stages of the process.

Wilson and Trotter (1933), in reporting on farmers' adoption of improved legumes and other practices in three Missouri counties, found that the more exposure one reports to messages about legume practices from any source, the greater the chances for adoption (Table 17, p. 32). Lionberger (1951) found in a study of low-income Missouri farmers that " … compliance with each of the approved practices is positively associated with the number of personal, reading, and radio sources of information recognized by the households. This indicates the desirability of a multiple approach to the problem of reaching low-income farmers with educational materials." Coleman and Marsh (1955) found high adopters from a list of 21 innovations ranked higher in their use of every single information source (pp. 98-99). Coughenour (1960) also found a positive correlation between the use of both institutionalized sources and print media and adoption of an innovation.

The discrete function generalizations suggested single information channels were effective at different stages. This led to methodological approaches that precluded looking for multiple channels. The desire to identify the single most influential channel led to a methodology that permitted only one response per stage. For example, the typical question at the evaluation stage asked, "After you had enough information to know quite a lot about [innovation], where or from whom did you get the information that helped you decide whether or not to actually try it out on your own farm?" (Rogers, 1957). The approach assumed that there was a single source of most influence since most often only one response was permitted. The same method was used across all stages, resulting in a matrix with one information source named per stage. When the 1957 and 1958 studies found that the one source named at the awareness and information stages tended to be mass media, and friends and neighbors were named at the evaluation stage, the generalizations were seen as being supported. The possibility of multiple channel use or interactions among media at a single stage could not be considered. This methodology was used in spite of the fact that some of the researchers were well aware that more than one source of information was being used at a stage. Wilkening (1956:34) observed that:

> "The low percentages giving the mass media for help in decision making and in the action stages of adopting changes does not mean that farmers do not obtain some help from them. The question elicits responses with respect to the most usual source for the different types of information and not with respect to the use of a source of information."

Changing the methodological approach in studies in which information-seeking behavior was examined across stages also changed the conclusions. Copp, Sill and Brown (1958) used a methodology that permitted farmers to mention more than one source per stage. They found that farmers did name multiple sources (an average of 1.6-2.0 for the awareness stage). However, it is difficult to make precise comparisons since their case study approach did not specifically ask farmers to name an information source or sources for each stage. In addition, for one of their three innovations, only 13% had moved beyond the information stage of adoption, limiting possible generalizations about the sequential use of various sources. The researchers found that farmers sometimes passed through a stage without indicating fresh sources of information. "In other words, earlier sources often possessed sufficient momentum to carry the farm operator through a number of later stages" (Copp, Sill and Brown, 1958: 149).

Coleman, Katz and Menzel (1966:56) used a methodology that focused on the order of use of media and the purposes for which they were used. While no attempt was made to place the use of media across the five stages of the process, they concluded: "the main point is that the decision to adopt gammanym (tetracycline) was based on a variety of sources of information."

In one of the studies most strongly questioning the discrete function generalizations, Mason (1962) assessed information source use independently of the usual battery of adoption stage questions. He used a series of scalable items to determine a person's adoption stage and then attempted to match patterns of information source use to persons at each stage. This approach permitted multiple information source responses for each stage. One finding was that mass media use increased across stages. Lionberger found that mass media (radio) was an important source of influence at both the early and late stages in the adoption process, and that television was capable of activating viewers to adopt. However, despite the fact that this finding was reported along with a summary of the classic diffusion articles, there was no change in the generalizations as a result (Foundation for Research on Human Behavior, 1958). Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1980: 159) in a study of public knowledge of local conflict-filled issues in two Minnesota regions found that newspapers were the primary initial source of information named. At a later time period, they found that the use of interpersonal sources had increased, but the use of newspapers had not declined. Both were about equal.

These studies indicate that, given the opportunity, respondents do tend to name a number of sources at each stage, and at least in some the number tends to increase as one moves through the process. In addition, a number of the studies downplay the relative importance of finding a single important source. Instead, they emphasize the contribution of many sources. Katz (1961:78), in a synthesis of both agricultural and medical diffusion studies, concluded that "in fact, it may be that the search for the 'most influential' medium is a fruitless one. It would seem that the focus should be the different uses of the media in varying social and psychological circumstances." In a more recent critique of the Subcommittee's view, Chaffee (1979; p. 21) argued that "to think in terms of competition between media and interpersonal channels is to misdirect one's attention from the most important factors governing the flow of information."

Recall of Information Seeking Activity

A final problem of the seminal studies for information seeking is that they are based on recall of information over a long period of time. The typical study looking at information source use at different stages of the adoption process began after many farmers had adopted, and asked respondents to reconstruct their information-seeking behavior over time periods as long as 30 years (Deutschmann and Fals-Borda, 1962) or even 50 years in the case of one of several innovations studied by Lee (1967). Ryan and Gross (1943, 1950), in one of the earliest and most influential studies, found that most farmers learned about hybrid seed corn in the period 1929-1931, yet did not adopt until 1936-1939. The survey was conducted in 1941, an average of 7 years after first knowledge and several years more after adoption for most farmers. Could farmers accurately recall where they first heard about hybrid seed corn after all those years? Ryan and Gross looked only at the first source of information, and most influential source. They report a residual category of "all others" which includes "unknown" of 9.1% for original knowledge and 7.0% for most influential. When five stages of the process are examined, would this likely increase the difficulty of recall?

Beal, Rogers and Bohlen (1957: 167), in justifying the validity of their five-stage model of the adoption process, reported that "farmers seemed to have little trouble recalling when they became aware of, tried, and adopted the practice and their sources of information at each stage." They noted that their data for the diffusion of 2,4-D and hog antibiotics contained "very few 'don't know' answers."

Other studies, however, do report some recall problems. Wilkening (1956) asked young Wisconsin farmers about their first source of information about new ideas in farming, their source of information that "helps you decide," and their source of information on "how much" or "when" to use the innovation. He found: "In obtaining responses to the questions used here there was some difficulty in getting respondents to distinguish between the three different types of information. This was particularly true for the second and third questions" (p. 363). One difference between this study and Beal et al. was that Wilkening was asking about a general topic - new ideas in farming - while Beal et al. were asking about specific innovations.

A second study (Lee, 1967) studied specific innovations, but also found that both low and middle-income Missouri farmers said they had trouble remembering sources of original information for some of the innovations. For some innovations, in fact, "I can't remember" was the most frequent answer given. Dramatic differences were found between low-income respondents who were the target of intensive Extension outreach efforts, and middle or low-income farm groups that were not intervention targets. Results ranged from a high of 44% saying "I can't remember" or "I don't know" for non-intervention middle-class dairy farmers to approximately 25% for middle class hog producers, low income non-intervention dairy farmers, and low-income non-intervention hog producers. For respondents in the intervention group, the "I can't remember" response was only 4%.

Rogers (1995: 122) offers this critique of the recall approach:

> "One weakness of diffusion research is a dependence on recall data from respondents as to their date of adoption of a new idea. .. This hindsight ability is not completely accurate for the typical respondent (Menzel 1957; Coughenour, 1965). It probably varies on the basis of the innovation's salience to the individual, the length of time over which recall is requested, and on the basis of individual differences in education, memory, and the like.
>
> "Diffusion research designs consist mainly of correlational analyses of cross-sectional data gathered in one-shot surveys of respondents (usually the adopters and/or potential adopters of an innovation)... If data about a diffusion process are gathered at one point in time, the investigator can only measure time through respondents' recall, and that

> is a rather weak reed on which to base the measurement of such an important variable.
>
> "More appropriate research designs for gathering data about the time dimension are: (1) field experiments, (2) longitudinal panel studies, (3) use of archival records, and (4) case studies of the innovation process with data from multiple respondents (each of whom provides a validity check on the others' data).... Unfortunately, alternatives to the one-shot survey have not been widely used in past diffusion research."

An improved study design to reduce the threat to validity of the recall problem would call for a longitudinal study, with farmers measured at multiple points as they pass through the adoption process. In this way, farmers would be recalling source use over a much shorter time period, and patterns in their responses would be evident over time.

Revised Propositions Concerning the Role of Information in the Diffusion Process

Our first proposition concerns the overall pattern of use of information sources as one moves through the adoption process:

Proposition No. 1:

As one moves through the adoption process, information-seeking from all available channels increases.

Our basis for this proposition rests on three factors:

1. Studies of the first type of generalizations consistently found that the naming of many information sources is common, and that those who use multiple sources tend to move through the adoption process more rapidly.
2. Most studies permitting respondents to name more than one source per stage find that they do.
3. Mason's (1962, 1963, 1964) research found that naming mass media as a source increased across stages rather than decreasing, and the reported use of all sources increased across stages.

This proposition would require a methodological approach which permits respondents to name multiple sources of information at each stage of the adoption process.

Access to Information with Relevant Content

Because both the amount of information available about an innovation and the mix of sources carrying that information change over time, it is important to consider these changes when studying patterns of information source use. Also important is individual access to relevant sources. To some extent, attention to these factors can help shed light on differences in information-seeking behavior by innovators and laggards. Two elements are involved here:

1. Access to Information Sources;
2. The Cycle of Media Content Relevant to the Innovation;

Access to Sources. Farm access to general media such as general farm magazines, radio, television, and newspapers has been found to be nearly universal by studies in the Midwest (Lionberger, 1951; Wilkening, 1953, 1956) and the Northeast (USDA Vermont Study, 1947). In the South, far wider variations in access to these media have been found (Coleman and Marsh, 1955; Yancey, 1982). In other countries, access is often a much more important variable. Rogers and Svenning (1969), for example, found that in rural Colombia few farmers had access to printed or broadcast messages relevant to innovations at any stage of the adoption process.

In the United States, access to specialized farm publications and services distinguish large and small farmers. The advent of controlled circulation farm publications that are sent only to farmers with certain crops and a minimum gross farm income has explicitly excluded smaller farmers. In these cases, small operators cannot receive these publications even if they are willing to pay for them. More significant are a variety of paid consulting and publication services that tend to be used only by large operators.

The Cycle of Media Coverage. Mass media tend to respond to news about innovations in much the same way as they respond to other forms of news. Often there is scattered and uneven coverage at first, followed by a time of peak coverage and intensive media interest. The innovation may become the "cover story" of magazines. After a time, coverage tends to decline (Abbott, 1979). In a study of what they termed "the hoopla effect," Abbott and Eichmeier (1998) found support for the idea that there is a regular pattern of media coverage of technological innovations. Abbott and Yarbrough (1989) found that the period of maximum coverage about farm computers came earlier than the time when significant adoption was occurring. Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1980) found that during the times of peak coverage, widespread awareness of news content could be found at all educational levels of a community, and the gap between those who know the most and those who know the least decreased. However, both before and after this peak in coverage, knowledge gaps would be expected to increase between the two groups.

This pattern of coverage would be expected to be reflected in increased mentions of mass media at the peak times of coverage, and a decline in mentions at other times. Thus, it would be important to compare the time period or periods when respondents were questioned with media content at those same periods.

Another important aspect of media or information cycles relates to what Rogers (1995) terms the "pro-innovation" bias of many of the diffusion studies.

Technologies selected for diffusion studies are not random; in many cases they are technologies that are the focus of interest and effort by industry, government agencies, or some other interest groups. Coleman, Katz and Menzel (1966) who studied the introduction of tetracycline by a drug company, found that drug salesmen were the most common first source of knowledge. They concluded: "…the relative importance of different sources or channels of communication about an innovation depends in part on what is available to the audience of potential adopters. For example, if a new idea is initially promoted only by the commercial firm that sells it, it is unlikely that other sources or channels will be very important, at least at the knowledge stage of the innovation-decision process" (Rogers (1995), p. 192).

This leads to our Proposition No. 2:

Information-seeking behavior is conditioned by the development and behavior of message production and delivery systems.

Willingness to Use Sources

Beyond access, several other important factors shape the extent to which members of an audience utilize information sources. Differential use of information sources has often been explained in terms of personality variables, with innovators much more eager to seek information and laggards clearly oriented to the past (Rogers, 1983). Scherer (1989) found that interest in using information sources of all types was closely related to socio-economic status. He explained this in terms of knowledge about how to control their information environment. Those who knew how to use information effectively use this ability across information channels. Rogers (1962:313) in his 1962 synthesis, put forward the generalization that "earlier adopters utilize a greater number of different information sources than do later adopters." Rogers attributed this to the fact that they have higher education, better abstract reasoning skills, and more ability and willingness to take risks.

Lionberger and Campbell (1971) found that when it comes to needing information, farmers go to the persons who are expected to be most knowledgeable, whether or not they are much like themselves. This tendency was found at every stage of the adoption process.

Although audience characteristics play an important role, the characteristics of the innovation itself may also influence channel use.
Jain (1965) in a study often cited in support of the original generalizations, found that the type of source used depended on the innovation. For hybrid seed corn and a weed control chemical, farmers used neighbors and friends for information. But for a record-keeping system, they used cosmopolite sources. An earlier study in Vermont found much the same thing. For innovations first mentioned by the interviewers, farmers tended to mention outside or

cosmopolite sources, but for innovations that the farmers themselves first mentioned, local sources or "self" tended to be mentioned.

This leads to our Proposition No. 3:

For economically-rational innovations, individuals who are habitually high information seekers will adopt earlier and will use information from all sources more.

Information-Seeking Behavior After Adoption

One problem in studying information-seeking after adoption of an innovation is that the question originally asked of respondents at this stage was ambiguous. Beal and Rogers (1960) asked: "After you once tried (antibiotics or 2,4-D weed spray) on your farm, how did you decide whether or not to continue using and actually adopt it?" A more appropriate wording for this stage might have been: "Where or from whom did you get information about the innovation after you adopted it?" This would parallel how questions at other stages were asked. The answer most commonly received by Beal and Rogers was that the farmer looked at the results of a trial and decided to continue based upon his own evaluation. Bohlen and Beal (1957) reported that in more than 90 percent of their studies, individual satisfaction with the idea was the most important factor in its continued use. Jain (1965), using the same approach as Beal and Rogers, got the same answer. An answer of "self" was difficult to compare with information-seeking responses at other stages, and as a result, the entire stage was often dropped from either the questionnaire or the analysis.

Beal and Rogers' (1957) companion study of adoption of new fabrics by housewives dropped analysis of the adoption stage. Neither Rogers nor Deutschmann and Fals-Borda included this stage in their Colombian studies (Deutschmann and Fals-Borda, 1962; Rogers, 1964; Rogers and Meynen, 1965; Rogers with Svenning, 1969). Mason (1963) did look at the communication behavior of farmers after adoption of an innovation. He found that in general, use of all sources increases as one moved across stages. However, there was an exception for high influentials after adoption, when use of mass media declined.

Recently, interest in what happens after adoption has increased. Rogers (1995) now refers to the adoption stage as a time of re-invention (adaptation of the innovation by the adopter) and confirmation (seeking reinforcement for the adoption decision). Rogers explains post-adoption information behavior partially in terms of a need to reduce dissonance. Cognitive dissonance research (Festinger, 1957) found that the highest levels of information seeking often occurred immediately following adoption, but he explained this as arising from a need to justify the adoption decision rather than a need to gather information about how to use the innovation.

Another possibility is that for computers and other general innovations that can do many things, questions about how to use or apply them become more salient after adoption. Books, manuals, dealers and other sources would be useful in answering these questions. Thus, some innovations may be associated with very high levels of information-seeking following adoption. Rogers implies this when he points out that "re-invention" is very likely for computers. Our proposition No. 1 already predicted a high level of information-seeking at the adoption stage. But in the special case of computers and other complex innovations, a unique proposition seems to be in order. While computers are an obvious example of an innovation with high post-adoption information seeking, we argue that many other innovations such as hybrid seed corn and minimum tillage agriculture probably follow the same pattern. In agriculture, for example, the adoption of hybrid seed corn was not a simple process, but involved consideration of changes in fertilizer, chemicals, planting densities, and storage issues. Thus, adoption of hybrid seed corn led to a significant increase in the need for information. Organic and minimum tillage agriculture are also complex innovations to implement.

This leads to our Proposition No. 4:

For innovations that are evolving internally or that are becoming more integrated with other practices, information seeking continues at a high level after adoption.

Using Information-Seeking Scores to Predict Behavioral Change

Proposition No. 1 predicts a positive correlation between one's stage in the adoption process and the total number of information sources being sought. One way of interpreting this finding is that as a person becomes more and more actively interested in an innovation, he or she is likely to seek out more and more information about it. Thus, at the awareness stage, one would expect a low level of information-seeking activity from any source. At the information or knowledge stage, more sources or more intensive use of existing sources would be expected. At the evaluation, persuasion or decision stages, when a respondent says he or she is seriously considering adoption, one would expect a very high level of information-seeking. Finally, a case has been made that after adoption of a computer or similar device, the rate of information-seeking would be expected to remain high.

Operationally, this means that if one were to follow information-seeking behavior of potential adopters over time, one would expect that those who exhibit little or no change in information-seeking would remain at their current adoption stage, and that those who raise their levels of information-seeking would move forward in the process by one or more stages. If our approach is correct, we would anticipate that a reduction in information-seeking activity should be associated with a backward movement in adoption. That is, a person at Time 1 who said he or she is seriously evaluating adoption of an innovation might move backward to the knowledge stage at Time 2. The original diffusion model did not anticipate this type of movement. One interpretation, and the one adopted here, is that while the traditional diffusion approach would require either a static condition or movement to adoption or rejection, in fact there is some "temporary suspension" of thinking about an innovation, which might mean that the person continues to read about an innovation, but is not now seriously considering it. A second possibility is that these changes might be due to random error. However, if the information-seeking activity would also decline as a person reports backward movement, this would indicate not only that the error is not random, but would demonstrate the close relationship between information-seeking activity and stage in the adoption process. This leads to the fourth proposition:

An increase in one's information-seeking behavior tends to be associated with a forward movement to a more advanced adoption stage, while a decrease in one's information-seeking is associated with a backward movement.

The Longitudinal Dataset

Data for the preliminary test of the propositions is taken from a longitudinal study of computer adoption by Iowa farmers initiated by J. Paul Yarbrough at Iowa State University in 1982, and continued by Clifford Scherer and Eric Abbott. The research was funded by the Iowa State University Agricultural and Home Economics Experiment Station. The study consisted of an initial panel of 1,000 randomly-selected farmers surveyed by mail in 1982, and then re-surveyed in 1984 and 1987; a second panel of 1,000 randomly-selected farmers surveyed by mail in 1984 and again in 1988; a third random sample of 1,000 surveyed in 1989; and a fourth random sample of 1,000 surveyed in 1997. The mail surveys used the Dillman (1978) Total Design Method, and resulted in return rates of between 65% and 75% (except for 1997, which had a return rate of 44%). By 1987 when the first panel had responded three times, it contained 303 farmers. The second panel, which responded for the second time in 1988, contained 440 farmers.

Each time the farmers were surveyed, they were asked two questions that are crucial for this analysis. First, they were asked to indicate where they were with respect to adoption of a computer. Following a classification similar to that developed by the original subcommittee, farmers were asked to indicate if they had given "little thought (awareness)" to computers, had sought "information" about computers (but not yet making any decision), were actively "deciding (evaluating)" whether or not to adopt, had actually "adopted," or had "rejected." Since the research began at a time when very few farmers had adopted, the problem of having to recall information from long ago was minimized. In addition, since these same farmers were surveyed repeatedly, it was possible to chart their adoption progress over a period of time. This avoids the problems with "one-shot" diffusion studies mentioned by Rogers.

The second variable was a series of questions concerning computer information seeking. Farmers were asked: "Within the past year, how often have you used the following sources to obtain information about computers?" There were 11 choices, which included both mass media and interpersonal sources.

Items were:

1. reading about them in magazines or newspapers;
2. reading books or computer manuals;
3. writing or telephoning for information from computer manufacturers or dealers;
4. visiting a computer dealer;
5. attending a computer exhibit or fair;
6. taking a computer short-course or workshop from a computer dealer, college or other organization;
7. attended an Extension meeting where part of the program was about computers;
8. talked with Extension staff about computers;
9. Talked with college or high school teachers about computers;
10. Talked about computers with other farmers who are using them;
11. Talked about computers with non-farm users.

For each item, respondents could indicate "never" (0), "once" (1), "twice" (2), "three times" (3), "four or more times" (4). A score was then calculated by adding all computer information-seeking items, yielding a possible range of from 0 to 44. Unlike the early diffusion studies, the use of all information sources was assessed, and then compared to the respondent's adoption stage.

Test of Proposition No.1

As one moves through the adoption process, information-seeking from all available channels increases.

Three of the random samples of Iowa farmers (1982, 1989 and 1997) were used for this test so that information-seeking could be examined at several different time periods. The two variables, stage of the adoption process and computer information-seeking, were compared for each time period.

Results, Table 3, show that Proposition No. 1 is supported in every time period. In each case, total computer information-seeking increases as one moves through the stages of the process, and is highest for those who have adopted a computer.

Table 3: Total computer information-seeking behavior
By computer adoption progress: 1982, 1989, 1997 Iowa random samples

Adoption Progress Scale	**1982**	**1989**	**1997**
"Little thought"	4.5	4.6	4.3
"Rejected" or "Discontinued"	4.7	5.4	2.9
"Obtained Information"	9.5	10.1	8.0
"Deciding or Decided to get a computer"	14.8	13.5	11.9
"Adopted a computer"	18.2	19.1	12.9
F linear test	273.6 (p<.000)	386.1 (p<.000)	105.4 (p<.000)
F deviation from linear	7.2 (p<.001)	6.8 (p<.001)	3.0 (p<.05)
Correlation	.57 (p<.000)	.62 (p<.000)	.53 (p<.000)

These results have very high F values on a linear test, indicating a highly significant increase for every year. Deviation scores are also significant, but at a much lower level, indicating that the increases are not perfectly linear. Nevertheless, there remains a high correlation in each group between computer information-seeking and the stage of the process.

A more rigorous test of the proposition would divide computer information-seeking in the three time periods by whether or not the sources were:

1. Impersonal media (articles or books)
2. Expert sources (extension staff, dealers, teachers, etc.)
3. Friends or neighbors

For this test, the 11 items used to construct the overall computer information-seeking score were divided into the three categories. Only one – computer fairs – was eliminated, since a fair could mean contact with friends, experts, or media sources. The others were grouped as follows:

1. Impersonal media:

- Read articles in magazines or books;
- Read books about computers (or computer manuals)

2. Expert sources:

- Written or telephoned for information from computer manufacturers or dealers;
- Visited a computer dealer;

- Taken a computer short course or workshop from a computer dealer, college or other organization;
- Attended an Extension meeting where part of the program was about computers;
- Talked with Extension staff about computers;
- Talked with college or high school teachers about computers.

3. Friends and neighbors:

- Talked about computers with other farmers who are using them;
- Talked about computers with non-farm users.

Scores have been standardized across categories. Results indicate strong support for the proposition. Use of sources increases significantly for every type of information across each of the three time periods. Analysis of variance tests for linearity show highly significant results for all columns of the table. Deviation from linearity scores are much lower, but indicate that relationships are not perfectly linear in several cases, especially for experts in 1982 and 1989. Use jumps rather suddenly rather than increasing in a linear fashion. High and significant correlations exist for every column of the table. The original generalizations would suggest that the use of mass media would decline as one becomes more serious about adoption, and that the use of friends and neighbors and expert sources would increase. Results, Table 4, show that information-seeking scores for all three categories increases as one moves across the adoption process. This supports Proposition No. 1 for all information sources.

Table 4

Mean Computer Information-Seeking by Source for 1982, 1989, and 1997 Iowa Random Samples

	1982			1989			1997		
	Media	Experts	Friends	Media	Experts	Friends	Media	Experts	Friends
Little Thought	2.5	.5	1.2	1.9	.4	1.4	1.5	.6	1.6
Rejected	2.3	.8	1.2	1.8	.7	1.7	.9	.3	1.3
Know-ledge	4.2	1.8	2.8	3.3	1.9	3.0	2.6	1.0	3.2
Decision	5.4	4.6	3.5	4.0	3.2	4.1	3.6	2.8	3.9
Adoption	6.8	6.7	3.8	5.6	6.1	4.5	4.0	3.2	3.8
F Linear test	147.3*	262.5*	95.1*	219.8*	330.0*	191.6*	67.6*	66.4*	56.6*
F Deviation from linear test	4.9*	14.0*	2.0	7.3*	35.8*	2.5	2.4	1.8	2.7*
Correlation	.46*	.56*	.39*	.52*	.59*	.49*	.44*	.44*	.41*

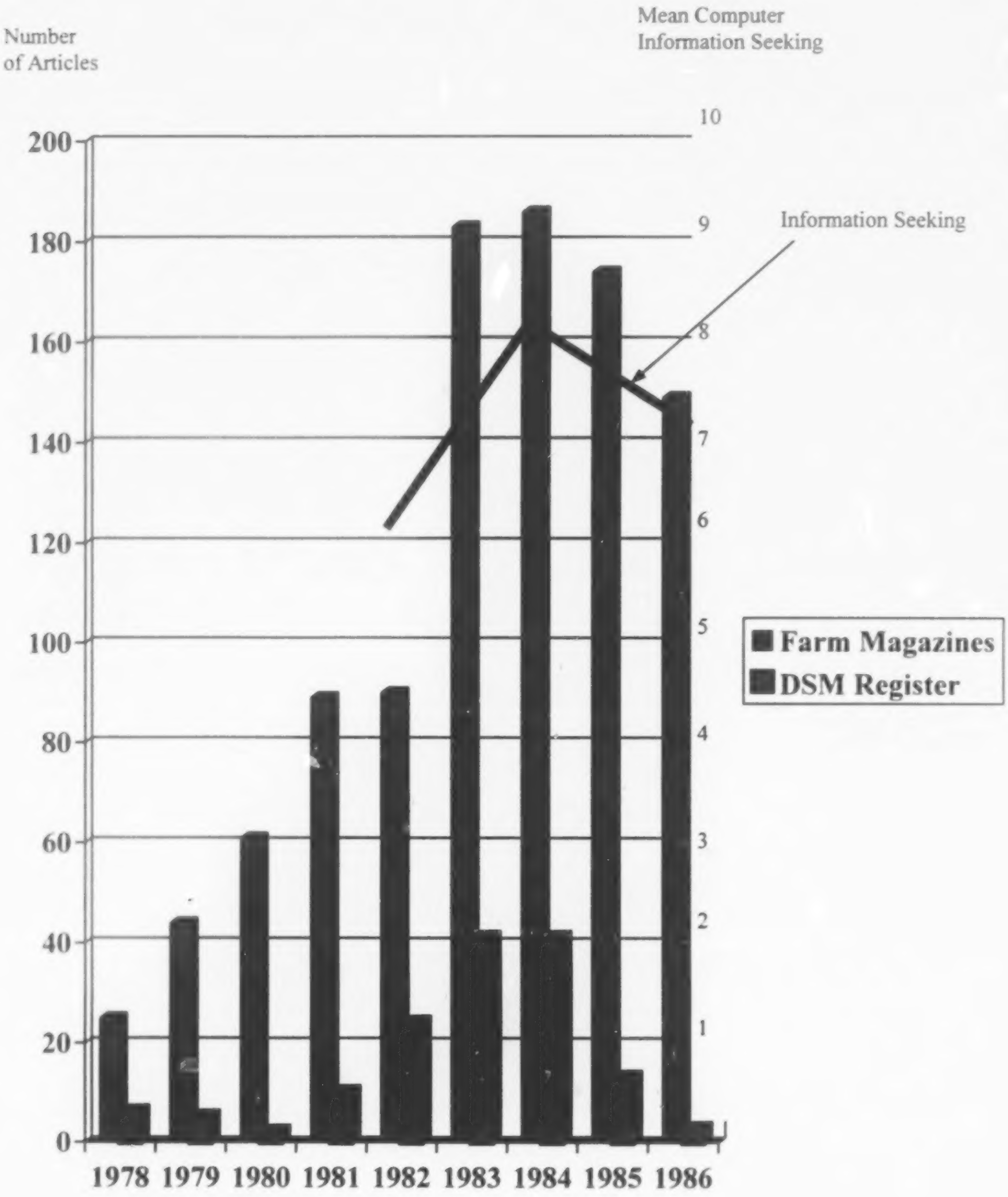
The reported use of a number of information sources does not indicate the value that might be placed on any one source, or the synergistic effect that might be brought about by the use of multiple sources. However, it is strongly suggestive of the fact that printed or impersonal media sources do not lose their importance as one moves through the adoption process.

Proposition No. 2

Information-seeking behavior is conditioned by the development and behavior of message-production and delivery systems.

This proposition deals with the message-production and delivery systems. In the tables testing Proposition No. 1, three different time periods are shown. A re-examination of the tables shows that the computer information-seeking scores decline across time for all types of sources. The availability of relevant media coverage could be expected to influence media use. Agenda setting theory, for example, has found a strong relationship between the amount of material in the press on a given topic and the public's ranking of the topic as being important or not important. The main emphasis of the current research was not on patterns of media coverage. However, during the initial period of computer diffusion, from 1978-1986, we conducted a content analysis of coverage of farm computers by farm magazines and the *Des Moines Register*. The results show a peak in coverage in 1983-84, which was a period of optimism about the future of farm computers. Two years later, the farm economy was in recession, and a number of new farm computer magazines went out of business. Figure 1 shows the pattern.

Figure 1:
Coverage of Farm Computers by Farm Magazines
and the Des Moines Register: 1978-1986



Media coverage patterns would indicate that the greatest likely use of information about farm computers would have occurred in the 1983-1984 peak, and would have declined somewhat thereafter. Unfortunately, a complete dataset showing what media provided after 1986 is not available. However, we can look at media use patterns by farmers during this time period using the panel that was surveyed in 1982, 1984, and 1987. Since these are the same individuals, we can control to an extent for differences across groups. In general, panel studies show an increase in scores over time as less willing or able individuals cease responding. However, as Table 5 shows, in this case the data support our proposition, especially for the mass media coverage. The 1984 group – matching the height of the media hoopla about farm computers – in general shows the highest computer information-seeking scores for media and experts, but not friends/neighbors. The analysis of variance test for linearity is not significant, but the significant quadratic test for a curvilinear relationship confirms that the 1984 year is higher (this is what we predicted). By 1987, when the farm depression hit and media coverage of farm computers declined, information-seeking scores declined for the knowledge, decision and adoption stages for almost all categories (the one exception again was the decision stage for friends). The tests for experts and friends are not as clear (but the proposition deals mainly with mass media). Use of experts is significant in both linear and quadratic tests, indicating that use of experts overall increased across time, and their use in 1984 was also highest. For friends, results show a linear trend, indicating a steady increase in interpersonal communication over time. Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1980) have found a close relationship between media coverage levels and interpersonal discussion and learning. Media tend to stimulate discussion.

Table 5: Trends in computer information-seeking
Iowa Panel No. 1: 1982, 1984, 1987

	Year			**F value**	
Source	**1982**	**1984**	**1987**	**Linear**	**Quadratic**
Media	3.0	3.4	3.1	1.53 n.s.	4.01 (p<.05)
Experts	1.2	2.3	2.0	23.7 (p<.000)	16.8 (p<.000)
Friends	1.6	2.3	2.5	34.6 (p<.000)	2.0 n.s.

Proposition No. 3

For economically-rational innovations, individuals who are habitually high information seekers will adopt earlier and will use information from all sources more.

Since this proposition is not in conflict with the body of findings from previous diffusion studies, no test of it is provided here. Existing diffusion literature has consistently found that those with high education seek out more information and adopt earlier. Part of the reason why information-seeking scores tend to decline over time is that innovators and early adopters tend to be well-educated, and thus are adept at seeking information from many different sources.

Proposition No. 4

For innovations that are evolving internally or that are becoming more integrated with other practices, information-seeking continues at a high level after adoption.

Our longitudinal study was of the adoption of computers, and results support the proposition. Information-seeking scores found among adopters in Tables 3, 4 and 5 were consistently the highest of any group across all types of information-seeking. This includes information-seeking from media sources, experts and friends/neighbors. The tendency of adopters to seek computer information is not limited to recent adopters. In fact, our 1997 dataset shows that those who adopted computers before 1990 have computer information-seeking scores (15.3) that are slightly higher than those who adopted in 1990 or later (13.1). Rogers explained information-seeking following adoption as being due in part to dissonance, with information-seeking occurring to allow the purchaser to justify the decision. However, long-term information-seeking patterns such as those shown in our data would be difficult to explain using dissonance theory. The pattern shown here suggests information-seeking for answers to questions about how to use the machine effectively and master new applications.

Because it is possible that computers form a special case, this proposition should be tested with a number of different types of evolving innovations. As mentioned earlier, it is our position that high post-adoption information-seeking would be found for many innovations.

Proposition No. 5

An increase in one's information-seeking behavior tends to be associated with a forward movement to a more advanced adoption stage, while a decrease in one's information-seeking is associated with a backward movement.

The focus of interest for testing this proposition is on the change across time between an individual's adoption stage and his or her information-seeking score. To test this, paired comparisons between the status of respondents at one point in time with another were made. For the first panel, two time periods could be compared – the change between 1982-1984, and between 1984-1987. For the second panel, one time period, 1984-1988, could be compared. This yielded two paired comparisons of 303 each for the first panel, and 440 for the second, for a total of 1044 comparisons.

Each comparison could fit into one of three categories:

(1) No change: the respondent might not have changed adoption stages between the two time periods. For example, a respondent who said he was at the information stage at time 1 and was still there at time 2 would be classified as no change;

(2) Forward Progress: the respondent has moved forward, for example from the awareness stage to information, evaluation or adoption; or from evaluation to adoption;

(3) Backward Progress: the respondent has moved backward, for example from evaluation back to information.

Based on their categories, respondents were then placed in cells in a matrix. For each cell, the mean computer information-seeking score was calculated, as well as the change in score from time 1 to time 2. The results are shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6:
Change in Information Behavior
By Change in Adoption Stage

		Before			
		Aware	**Information**	**Evaluation**	**Adoption**
After	**Aware**	5.3 **0.14**	6.0 **-1.64**	10.5 **-8.99**	9.7 **-7.21**
	Information	6.8 **0.06**	8.3 **-2.44**		
	Evaluation	13.7 **2.51**		14.8 **-1.91**	
	Adoption	16.9 **4.36**			19.5 **-3.33**

N=1044 paired comparisons
Pooled Iowa Panels: 1982-1984; 1984-1987; 1984-1988
Top Number in each cell is the mean computer information-seeking score
Bottom Number in each cell is the change in computer-information-seeking between Before and After.

First, we examine the characteristics of individuals in the first group – who have not changed their adoption status. These respondents are found in the band of cells from top left to bottom right of the table. These are individuals who were in the awareness stage "before" and are still there "after," the Information stage before and after, etc. The mean computer information-seeking scores show the same trend that we saw in our earlier analysis of the random samples – as one moves from awareness through information, evaluation and to adoption, computer information-seeking scores climb. The second figure, in boldface, shows the change in scores. Note that the scores become slightly negative across time. One reason for this slight negative trend was shown when testing Proposition 2. As mass media coverage declines somewhat over time, use of sources declines.

The second group, those who have made forward progress are shown in the dark box at the bottom left of the table. For example, those who were only aware "before" and are now at the information stage "after" are shown in the box at the top of the darkened area. Figures are also shown for movement to evaluation and adoption from lower "before" stages. Note that once again, mean computer information-seeking scores rise as one moves to more advanced adoption process levels. More importantly, the change score is positive, and becomes more positive as one moves through information to evaluation and then to adoption.

The third group, those who have moved backward through the process, are shown in the dotted area at the top right of the table. These individuals now report that they are at an earlier stage of the adoption process than they were when first measured. Note that the change score for individuals in this group is negative, and for those moving from adoption and evaluation to a lower stage, it is very negative.

These results offer strong preliminary support for our proposition. Changes in information-seeking behavior are closely associated with actual changes in adoption progress. And the changes may be positive or negative.

Conclusions

There have been several previous critiques of the diffusion theory generalizations dealing with the role of information in the adoption process, including Chaffee's 1979 paper and critiques by diffusion scholars themselves. This paper goes beyond these earlier critiques in two important respects. First, it develops four new propositions designed specifically to redirect attention to important areas of information-seeking that have not been adequately investigated by diffusion researchers. Second, it tests the propositions using a longitudinal dataset designed especially to measure multiple channel information-seeking and adoption behavior over time.

Four New Propositions

Multiple Sources

By presenting information-seeking as an additive process rather than a discrete process, our approach attempts to redefine the paradigm about the role of information-seeking in the diffusion process. Once an additive approach is followed, research can begin on synergistic ways in which adopters use information sources simultaneously. Both the Columbia researchers and the members of the subcommittee were interested in the roles of different media channels (impersonal vs. personal), but this emphasis on a discrete approach (that mass media inform and friends persuade) obscured the ways in which people use many media sources for similar purposes.

The additive approach conceptualizes the initial source as a product of the pattern of use of information sources by adopters. Whatever channel is customarily available that carries new information will be used. In the classic hybrid seed corn study (Ryan and Gross, 1943), it was salesmen. In the Columbia researchers' medical innovation study (Coleman, Katz and Menzel, 1966) it was drug detail men. In Sill (1958), it was Extension – an agency that was dedicated to reaching farmers with new information on specific innovations. Similarly, where mass media are widely available and carry relevant content, they are often named as the initial source (Beal and Rogers, 1957, Rogers and Beal, 1958). Where mass media are not widely available, as in many developing countries, interpersonal sources are found to be the key initial source (Rogers and Svenning, 1969; Deutschman and Fals-Borda, 1962).

Once there is interest in an innovation, which is likely to be caused by both available information and a cognitive realization that an innovation might be useful, there is a dramatic acceleration of information-seeking from all sources perceived to have useful information. Chaffee (1979) suggested that information consumers typically cross-check sources to verify and validate information. Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1980) find that when information saturation occurs in communities about a relevant local topic, considerable learning takes place among all socio-economic levels, and there is a significant relationship between interpersonal communication and learning from newspapers and other media. Chaffee and Choe's (1980) study of voting behavior shows that campaign deciders wake up to the fact that it is time to pay attention to the campaign about a month or two before the election, and begin to use both interpersonal and mass media sources. Pre-campaign deciders, on the other hand, attend to multiple information channels almost from the beginning and continue to use them throughout the campaign.

How audiences utilize multiple information sources to make sense of what an innovation offers, how they evaluate what is a credible source and what is not, and how the totality of information is used to reach a decision would be a productive new area for diffusion research. In the area of computers, computer magazines that offer detailed information and comparative performance trials might be considered more valuable in the decision process than the fact that a neighbor or friend happens to be using a computer, although surely potential adopters would check both. Kosicki's (1990) notion that people's history with information channels leads to development of framing strategies that guide subsequent source use and evaluation is an example of where this research might lead.

Shifts in Mass Media and Interpersonal Content

The idea that there is a constantly-shifting pool of information and media about an innovation - with a hoopla period or waves of coverage - suggests that much more attention should be paid to the patterns of *provision* of information across time. Rather than being viewed as a *constant*, with differential use being attributed to personality factors (innovators versus laggards), seeing the information system as dynamic refocuses attention on what was available at any given point in time, and what audiences were stimulated to talk about. Early adopters tend to adopt during hoopla periods when there are many different sources of information available and considerable interpersonal discussion. Is it surprising that evidence shows that they use them? Laggards, coming later, find information channels carry less information. At the same time, as more and more people have adopted, it is more likely that laggards will encounter someone who has adopted or knows about the innovation. This would explain why laggards tend to use such interpersonal sources.

The discussion here is not intended to suggest that all differences can be accounted for by change in the types of information available. We agree with the strong evidence frequently cited in diffusion literature showing that education is a powerful force shaping patterns of attention and use of information sources. Our assertion is only that information channel content is *dynamic* and should be studied along with education and other factors.

Information-Seeking Following Adoption

Diffusion researchers have already begun to focus on the adoption and post-adoption stages of the process (adoption, re-invention, confirmation – see Rogers, 1995). Our contribution here is to suggest that for innovations that are evolving internally or complex, information-seeking is likely to continue at a high level for some time. Our computer data show that information-seeking levels remain high for up to 20 years following adoption --higher than any other stage of the adoption process. This is a long-term area of information use that needs to be studied further. Although Rogers' (1995) notion that dissonance theory might explain some of the information-seeking that goes on following adoption, our evidence indicates that there must be much more going on than that. Rogers (1995) development of the "re-invention" and "confirmation" stages represents an important step in studying post-adoption behavior.

Many innovations, such as taking a long-term drug for a heart or bone density condition, organic farming, or changing to low-fat cooking, are actually complex in their ramifications and probably stimulate long-term information-seeking behavior. Although more study is needed, we expect that computers are not unique in high information-seeking after adoption.

Forward and Backward Progress

The proposition concerning forward and backward adoption progress of people over time, and the close relationship between patterns of innovation information-seeking and changes in adoption stage, suggest that information-seeking can to some extent be taken as a barometer of adoption progress. When levels increase, forward progress is likely (although rejection is also possible). When they decline, suspension of interest or even discontinuance may occur. The pattern strongly supports the notion that adoption is related not to the use of any one type of information source (e.g. interpersonal) but to use of the whole spectrum of information sources.

Backward progress illustrates the need for study of the dynamic process by which people are activated to consider adoption and then lose their interest. Although not shown in the figure presented, we found that "rejection" is a dynamic phenomenon – today's rejecter may be tomorrow's adopter. Rejection, which in some few cases actually is the result of a carefully considered decision, is more often a statement of not wanting to think about an innovation. That is why information-seeking scores associated with rejection are so similar to the "little thought" group scores.

Instead of a one-way linear process, we now see the adoption process as potentially containing a number of periods of interest followed by periods of inactivity, initial rejection followed by information-seeking followed by yet another rejection, or adoption followed by discontinuance. Changes in individual circumstances, such as receiving a substantial tax refund, may set in motion information-seeking and adoption behavior that had been inactive for some time.

A Revised Methodological Approach and Longitudinal Study

The second contribution of our research has been to go beyond criticism of the original generalizations, and to develop and test a methodology for the alternative propositions. Characteristics of the revised methodology include:

- A combination of panel and random sample surveys taken over the period of diffusion of the innovation;
- Questions that document both the adoption progress stage and innovation information-seeking at every survey point.

The approach addresses a number of criticisms that Rogers (1995) has made of existing diffusion datasets, including the problems of recall over long periods of time and reliance on one-shot surveys. It also measures post-adoption information-seeking behavior, up to 20 years after the innovation was adopted.

Our dataset is somewhat unique, in that it began when computers first became commonly available and has now continued through the innovator (2.5%), early adopter (13.5%) and early majority (34%) stages using both panel and random samples. Panel data have permitted us to examine specific changes in individual behavior over time, while the random samples have provided estimates of overall adoption progress and information-seeking at regular points in time. Such datasets are needed to move diffusion research beyond its current level.

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